



SHORT
PLAYS
FOR
SMALL
STAGES

COSMO HAMILTON

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SHORT PLAYS
FOR SMALL STAGES

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SHORT PLAYS FOR SMALL STAGES

BY
COSMO HAMILTON

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IN THE HAYMARKET.

A LOVE STORY IN ONE ACT.

Cast.

MR. BEVERLEY.

LORD CRANFORD.

MR. BETTERTON.

MR. WELLS.

BATES (*Beverley's man*).

MRS. MINCHANT (*Lady Betty's companion*).

LADY BETTY BURNAY.

Scene: BEVERLEY'S house in the Haymarket. Midnight-Period, 1750.

A sitting-room with doors R and L. A recess window C at back. Card-table down C. Furniture to dress stage.

When curtain rises, BATES, an old servant, timid and respectable, is lighting the candles about the room. Off L a ringing, careless voice can be heard singing "Hey nonny, nonny!"

A church clock in the distance strikes twelve.

BATES (*tearfully, as with trembling hand he lights one of the candles*). Five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve. Deary, deary! This London life's wearing me away. (*Irri-tably*.) Take the flame, fool!

IN THE HAYMARKET.

BEVERLEY (*in room L*). Bates, Bates, I say!

BATES. Sir, sir.

BEVERLEY. Bates, you rogue!

BATES. This minute, sir.

A voice passes open window singing a snatch of a French song.

BEVERLEY. Egad, man, are you deaf or lame, or is this mutiny?

BATES (*hurrying*). Coming, sir, coming. (*A loud knocking at outer door.*) (*Turning R.*) Coming sir, coming.

BEVERLEY (*impatiently*). Hang it, dodderer, am I to become hoarse a-calling?

(Another loud knock.)

BATES (*going L*). Who am I to attend to, sir? Your honour blasphemes me on the left, and someone hammers for me on the right——

BEVERLEY. Very well, wait upon the one who hammers. And Bates——

BATES (*stopping fretfully on the way to door R*). Sir. Oh, my knees!

BEVERLEY. Unless it be Mr. Wells I am ill abed.

BATES. Ay, sir (*going to door R*). Would to Heaven you were, although no one would regret it more than I. (*Another loud knock.*) Oh, coming, coming.

He goes out. Bolts are withdrawn and a door opened.

WELLS (*without*). Is your master to hand?

BATES (*without*). He is, sir, if it's Mr. Wells, otherwise he's ill abed!

WELLS (*entering*). I' faith then your master is not abed. Wells is my name. Beverley!

IN THE HAYMARKET.

BEVERLEY (*still in room R*). Is that you, Charles?

WELLS. Who else? Why under Heaven am I sent for at this unconscionable hour?

Enter BATES.

BEVERLEY. Some people are hard to please. What's wrong with the hour, pray? The day is about to begin. I'm with you in a moment, old friend.

WELLS (*turning to BATES*). Upon my soul, there is madness in the Haymarket to-night. I am fetched from my bed by the master to see the man lighting instead of snuffing the candles.

BATES. Ay, your honour. Madness it is for certain. Instead of undressing for the night my master is dressing for it.

WELLS. Dressing at this hour? Impossible!

Enter BEVERLEY in his breeches, shirt-sleeves and ruffs.

BEVERLEY (*in a state of high excitement and spirits*). Damn it, man, you wouldn't have me receive my Lord Cranford in my night-shift, would you?

WELLS (*with sudden earnestness*). Cranford coming here?

BATES. Good lack!

BEVERLEY. Why not? 'Tis an easy walk from St. James's?

WELLS. Cranford, whom all the world knows to be no friend of yours?

BEVERLEY. If one only entertains one's friends, old sleepy-head, the seats of one's chairs will never need re-covering.

WELLS. I'm no chicken-livered pimp that's afraid

to see you give your blade the cold air to breathe, but if you have brought me here to second you in a fight with Cranford——

BEVERLEY. Egad, but I have, Charles!

BATES (*drops his taper with a groan*). God save us!

BEVERLEY. How now, master Bates? Do you wish to set the house afire?

WELLS. I do not wonder at the old man's terror. Cranford and the devil are twins.

BEVERLEY (*with a burst of laughter*). Lud! but you make my lord to be older than the hills!

BATES. Oh, what would his poor mother have said, God rest her soul!

WELLS. Beverley, Beverley, give me the truth. You are an apt pupil of the sword, but I heartily trust that you have no duel with this man.

BEVERLEY (*gripping WELLS'S arm*). Old friend, I have you with me to-night to watch me fight with Cranford for something that is dearer to me than honour—stronger than the love of life. To-night I am to fight for love, to win the woman who holds my heart by the tips of her dainty fingers.

WELLS. Lady Betty Burnay!

BEVERLEY. The very mention of the name sets my blood racing in my veins and makes my breath come short as though I had run a mile! But no swords are to be drawn.

BATES. Praise the Lord!

WELLS. How then do you fight?

BEVERLEY. With the dice, old friend.

WELLS. The dice?

BEVERLEY. All the world knows how matters

stand between Cranford and my Lady Betty and I. In all London we are the only two men upon whom her divinity deigns to cast a glance. Neither of us has progressed farther than the other in her regard.

WELLS. But, my Lord Cranford has the best of you in position and money, and we all know that her ladyship must have both to make her happy.

BEVERLEY. And in that regard, egad, has my lord the advantage of me as we stand at present. But——

WELLS. Ay! the but is large enough to drown a regiment in! You are a poor gentleman.

BEVERLEY. But a gentleman, thank God. And as to the other thing—the money—it is for that for which we throw to-night. I have realised my estate in Warwickshire, my horses, my jewels, this house, everything I possess in the world. Three throws of the dice are to decide whether I lose it all or whether I win a sum double the value from Cranford.

WELLS (*in a low voice*). How much is at stake?

BEVERLEY. Sixteen thousand pound to win—eight thousand and the sweetest lady that ever trod the earth to lose.

BATES. Good luck!

WELLS. In three throws?

BEVERLEY. Ay, in three throws! In my present mood, with the certain feeling that the gods of Luck and Love are on my side, I would not care if it were to be decided in one!

WELLS. In all gravity, Beverley, I beg of you not

to let the dice decide your fate. Cranford has the devil's luck. I'll stake my life on it that he will win.

BEVERLEY (*quietly*). I am staking my life and more than my life—all I hold most dear and most sacred in the world—that he will not win.

WELLS. But is her ladyship of so mercenary a disposition that she will give her love only to the man who can provide her with luxuries? If so, she is little worth the fighting for. Go to her as you are. You have the better of Cranford in the matter of years and looks. It is said that she has shown you the preference.

BEVERLEY (*shaking his head*). No, old friend. What she has given to me one day she has given to Cranford the next. She has coquetted with us both and does not know which of us it is that holds her heart. I am not the man to win her without the means to give her a fitting nest. I have decided. No argument can change my decision. The great question of the moment is the colour of my coat. I believe in colour. Come, which shall it be—mauve or salmon, blue or purple? Damme, man, don't stand gaping there as if you saw a grave at your feet. (*He takes WELLS'S arm and leads him excitedly to his room L.*) To the wardrobe, to the wardrobe! A gentleman of proper parts and good breeding should be dressed as befits him whether he goes to church or to the gallows.

They enter together, shutting the door. BATES follows up, wringing his hands.

BATES. Oh, Lord, Lord, what's to become of us?

The old place gone that's been in the family these hundred years an' more ; this house, the jewels, and everything, for the sake of a woman !

The door R is pushed open. There is a ripple of laughter. Enter LADY BETTY BURNAY, followed by MRS. MINCHANT pulling at her dress.

MRS. MINCHANT (*in great distress*). Oh fie, fie, your ladyship. You would not enter a gentleman's rooms at this hour of the night !

LADY BETTY (*laughing*). Lud, ma'am, but you insisted on doing so and I am here to play propriety.

BATES (*turning aghast*). Your ladyship !

LADY B. Ah, Bates, is it the custom here to leave the door ajar for passers-by to enter at will ? Where is Mr. Beverley ?

MRS. M. I declare your ladyship that I cannot permit this indelicate intrusion.

BATES. Oh, your ladyship, I beg of you not to enter.

LADY B. My good man, I *have* entered. This is not the first time that my companion and I have been in these rooms. The only difference between this call and the others is that this is an earlier one. Where is Mr. Beverley ?

BATES. In his room, your ladyship.

MRS. M. He may have retired for the night, dear lady. Oh, that I should be forced into a situation so trying !

LADY B. If this were other than a sitting-room I could understand your modest fears. Don't

pluck me, ma'am, I am no chicken! Send in our names to your master, sirrah!

BATES. Oh, your ladyship, I humbly beseech you not to stay! This is no place for ladies.

MRS. M. There! What did I tell your ladyship! Oh, how distressing a position for a gentlewoman!

LADY B. Who is with Mr. Beverley?

BATES. Mr. Wells, your ladyship, and every moment my master is expecting my Lord Cranford and other gentlemen.

LADY B. My Lord Cranford? Art sure, good Bates?

BATES. Only too sure, your ladyship.

LADY B. (*to* MRS. MINCHANT). Cranford, at this time o' night, with friends! What can this mean?

MRS. M. Your ladyship knows better than most that there can be no love lost between these gentlemen. He, he, he!

LADY B. (*agitated*). Neither gentleman was at the masque to night—hints were flying round as to a duel—if it should be——(*She suddenly grips Bates by the arm.*) Oh, good Bates, dear Bates, tell me what is to happen?

MRS. M. (*in a flutter of fear*). Oh, dear Heaven, why did I permit this wild visit?

BATES. Madame, it is as much as my place is worth to tell you.

LADY B. I will make good anything that you may suffer—only tell me, quick!

BATES. There is to be a duel.

LADY B. Oh, Heavens!

BATES. A duel with the dice. My master throws the dice with Lord Cranford to lose all that he has in the world to win double.

LADY B. Thank God it is not to be fought with swords. But why is Mr. Beverley indulging in this recklessness?

MRS. M. Ah, it is plain to me. Your ladyship told him that you could never wed with a poor man, and Mr. Beverley is risking all to win a fortune.

LADY B. Is that so, Bates?

BATES. That is so, your ladyship.

LADY B. Oh, my Beverley! For me you will stand to lose the very means of life. It is fate that brings me here to-night.

MRS. M. Begging your ladyship's pardon, I do not call it fate but perverseness.

LADY B. I will tell you why I came. I came because I have grown tired of playing the coquette with the man I love; to show him that my preference is with him and not with Cranford. I determined to let him see into my heart at the masque to-night. He did not come, and throwing convention to the winds, I broke into his house. Oh, my Beverley!

MRS. M. (*vinegarishly*). Your ladyship, whose habits are proverbially expensive, will find it difficult to wed a beggar.

LADY B. I shall not wed a beggar. Beverley will win!

MRS. M. If he lose?

LADY B. Then shall we be rich in our love.

BATES (*eagerly*). And now I will assist your ladyship to your chair.

MRS. M. Yes, indeed. It would not look well for you to be caught in these rooms by his lordship.

LADY B. Lud! what care I? You may go, good Minchant. I stay here to watch the game and cheer the winner.

(A loud rat-tatting at the door.)

BATES. Oh, madame, this is his lordship.

MRS. M. What's to be done? What's to be done?

LADY B. *(with a ripple of laughter)*. Let us take our positions in the stage-box and enjoy the play.

(Another knock.)

MRS. M. What mean you, madame? There is nowhere for us to go! We shall be seen!

LADY B. Lud, your wits have taken holiday. Curtains may make conventional hiding, but I am thankful for small mercies. Come, ma'am, are you not delighted at the turn of events?

MRS. M. I would give a year of my life to be safe in bed.

(Another knock.)

LADY BETTY *chuckles and hurries* MRS. MINCHANT *behind the curtain, going behind it herself. Door L opens, and BEVERLEY and WELLS can be heard talking. BATES runs to door R; goes out. CRANFORD and BETTERTON talk without.*

CRANFORD. Is Mr. Beverley within?

BATES. He is, my lord.

Enter BEVERLEY and WELLS from L, as CRANFORD and BETTERTON enter from R.

BEVERLEY. My lord, I have the honour to wish you a very good evening.

CRANFORD. Mr. Beverley, I have the pleasure to wish *you* a very good morning.

They bow low. LADY BETTY *sticks her head out and makes a face at* BATES, *who waves her away.*

BEVERLEY. Will your lordship permit me to present Mr. Wells?

CRANFORD (*to* WELLS, *with a slightly insolent air*). Sir, I know your tailor.

WELLS (*bowing*). I am honoured, my lord.

CRANFORD. This is Mr. Betterton, gentlemen; too much of a fool to be a knave——

BETTERTON (*with a giggle*). But sufficiently clever to be an excellent fool. (*He bows mincingly.*)

CRANFORD. And now, gentlemen, let us to business. Mr. Beverley, are our weapons ready?

BEVERLEY (*lightly*). All ready, my lord. (*He rattles the dice in a box and puts the box on the table.*)

CRANFORD. Then, as I have a pestering baggage waiting for me in Panton Street, I think we will begin. Mr. Wells and Mr. Betterton, you will be witnesses to this transaction.

BETTERTON. Beyond that it is a matter of the heart—in the which, 'fore God, I am an accomplished sufferer—I know nothing.

BEVERLEY. Perhaps my Lord Cranford will be good enough to explain, sir.

CRANFORD. In a few words, gentlemen, Mr. Beverley and I are suitors for the hand of the beautiful Burnay.

BETTERTON. He, he, he! Dear puss!

BEVERLEY (*treads deliberately on his foot*). Your pardon, sir.

BETTERTON (*with a cry of pain*). It is a pleasure, sir.

CRANFORD. Her ladyship, who as you know, is an orphan with scanty means and expensive tastes, has tacitly led the *beau monde* to suppose that her choice of a husband lies between Mr. Beverley and myself.

BETTERTON. Egad, then her ladyship has as nice a discernment as she has an ankle.

BEVERLEY (*stamping on BETTERTON'S other foot*). Again I crave your pardon, sir.

BETTERTON (*with a yell*). And again it is a pleasure, sir.

CRANFORD. Betterton's feet are like one's mistresses, always in the way. To continue. As all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance well know, Mr. Beverley is of an optimistical disposition, and he believes that the only advantage I have over him in this, our rivalry for the lady's hand, is in the matter of money. Am I right, sir?

BEVERLEY (*with his head high*). Very right, my lord. "Faint heart never won fair lady," it is said.

BETTERTON. An empty purse, in this case, never. He, he, he!

BEVERLEY *makes a movement*, BETTERTON *shifts his feet uneasily*.

CRANFORD. That being so, gentlemen, I have engaged to throw with Mr. Beverley for all the

money he possesses, a matter of eight thousand pounds, and if I lose to pay him double.

BETTERTON. Double?

CRANFORD. The loser, beyond this, to give his word of honour to leave the field absolutely to the winner. Will you correct me if I err, sir?

BEVERLEY. You voice our bargain to the letter, my lord.

BETTERTON. How many throws to decide, my dear Mr. Beverley!

BEVERLEY. Three, my dear Mr. Betterton (*handing the dice-box to CRANFORD*). Permit me, my lord.

CRANFORD. If it's all the same to you, sir, I will throw last. Mr. Wells and Mr. Betterton will keep the score.

WELLS and BETTERTON *gather round the table*. CRANFORD *takes out his snuff-box carelessly*.

BEVERLEY (*with a profound bow to CRANFORD*). Your lordship's most obedient.

CRANFORD (*bowing sarcastically*). Your politeness overwhelms me, sir.

BEVERLEY *shakes back his ruff, goes to the table, lifts the box high*.

BEVERLEY (*under his breath*). The goddess of Luck be with me!

(*He rattles the dice and throws.*)

LADY BETTY'S head comes eagerly through the curtain. BATES comes nearer in a state of trembling fear.

WELLS and BETTERTON (*in a breath*). Five!

BEVERLEY (*breathlessly*). Ah!

IN THE HAYMARKET.

CRANFORD. Not so bad, sir. Better luck next time.

BEVERLEY. I thank you, my lord.

WELLS *puts the dice in the box, and hands it to BEVERLEY, who rattles and throws again.*

WELLS and BETTERTON. Twelve!

BETTERTON. S'death! There's magic in 'em.

(LADY BETTY *smiles in delight.*)

CRANFORD (*carelessly*). I have seen twelve turn up three times in succession many times. Mr. Beverley, luck smiles upon you, sir.

BEVERLEY. Yes, i' faith. She is kinder than I dared hope.

BETTERTON. But, like all the tender sex, dear sir, she is fickle. There is still one more throw.

BEVERLEY. Give me the box, Charles. (*His hand trembles. He throws, after an instant's pause, and keep his hands on the box.*)

BETTERTON. Uncover, dear sir, uncover.

LADY BETTY's *face still smiles. BATES has crept up to the table. BEVERLEY uncovers and steps back.*

WELLS and BETTERTON. Five!

CRANFORD. Five, hey! Still, twenty-two is a fine total, Mr. Beverley, but few short of the best possible.

BEVERLEY (*in a low voice*). It is with you, my lord.

CRANFORD *steps forward in silence and bows to BEVERLEY, who returns it without a word. CRANFORD takes the box from WELLS, shakes carelessly and throws.*

WELLS and BETTERTON. Six!

CRANFORD *takes the box and throws again.*

BEVERLEY *watches anxiously.* LADY BETTY'S face undergoes a change. She leans forward eagerly. MRS. MINCHANT is smiling. BATES has his hands to his lips.

WELLS and BETTERTON. Eight!

BEVERLEY (*with a gasp*). Ah!

CRANFORD. Mr. Beverley, if you would care to cancel our agreement——

BEVERLEY. Zounds, no, my lord!

CRANFORD. Very well, sir. Permit me, Mr. Wells (*he takes box and throws without a pause, keeping his hand on the box*). For the sport of the thing, Mr. Beverley, I am ready to add another thousand pound to the sum already fixed?

BEVERLEY. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, my lord, had I the sum to add. My sword and my honour are alone left me. Pray let us see the throw.

(CRANFORD *uncovers*.)

WELLS and BETTERTON. Twelve!

BEVERLEY (*involuntarily*). My God!

(LADY BETTY *withdraws her head*.)

CRANFORD (*turning to BEVERLEY*). Sir, your most obedient servant to command. (*He bows elaborately*).

BEVERLEY (*trying to speak lightly*). My lord, a thousand congratulations.

BETTERTON (*simpering*). Lud! by just a lettle, lettle figure.

WELLS (*grasping BEVERLEY'S hand*). Oh! Beverley.

BEVERLEY (*in a loud voice, throwing WELLS'S hand away*). Bates, the wine. Dost hear me, sirrah?

CRANFORD. Not for me, Mr. Beverley, I must withdraw. Can I lend you any money to take you to France, sir? Command me.

BEVERLEY. No, I thank you, my lord.

CRANFORD. The *beau monde* will lose one of its brightest ornaments.

BEVERLEY. But will retain one far more dazzling.

CRANFORD. I thank you, sir. Betterton, I will not join her baggageship in Pantton Street, but will home to bed. I will convey your respects to the beautiful Burnay in the morning, sir.

LADY B. (*coming out*). The morning is with us, my Lord Cranford. Why not convey them to her ladyship now?

(*All the men turn up towards her.*)

Gentlemen, your servant. (*She bows.*)

(*All the men bow except CRANFORD.*)

CRANFORD (*angrily*). Mr. Beverley, what is the meaning of this?

BEVERLEY. My lord, I had no more knowledge——

CRANFORD. Pshaw!

BEVERLEY (*clapping his hand on his sword*). My lord!

LADY B. (*coming down between them*). Gentlemen, gentlemen, no violence, I pray! The sight of naked swords would give my woman hysterics. My lord, I have watched the play with the greatest interest. I am indeed honoured at the condescension that Mr. Beverley and your lordship have shown for me. (CRANFORD *raises her hand to his lips*. BEVERLEY *stands facing the*

audience with a set face.) I understand that you have won the right to enter into competition for my hand in marriage without a rival?

CRANFORD. That is so, madame.

LADY B. I say nothing as to the estimation of my mercenariness held by Mr. Beverley and your lordship. The man who wins me must indeed have much to lay at my feet. All that remains for me to do in order to round off this evening's entertainment is to give my hand to the man who holds my heart. Pray do not be backward in making your appeal, my lord.

CRANFORD. Does your ladyship imply that it is your wish that I should do so now?

LADY B. Yes, my Lord Cranford, so that the *beau monde*, which will be discussing this matter to-morrow, may know the true end of it.

BEVERLEY (*bursting out*). Madame, for God's sake spare me this.

LADY B. (*coldly*). Sir, I have not been spared before these gentlemen. I await your lordship's pleasure.

CRANFORD (*going on his knee*). Most beautiful lady, I have the honour to lay at your feet my titles, my estates, and all my worldly goods——

LADY B. You do not include your heart, my lord.

BEVERLEY. Would God that I were dead! (*He turns away.*)

CRANFORD. And, beyond all, my heart, madame; and to crave your ladyship to deign to raise them from the earth.

LADY B. And I have the honour to ask your lordship to stand upon your feet, taking with you

your titles, your estates, and, beyond all your heart, for all of which I have no use,

CRANFORD (*angrily rising*). Madame!

BEVERLEY (*springing forward*). Madame!

LADY B. Gentlemen, the entertainment is at an end. Lord Cranford, I wish you a very good morning. (*She bows low.*)

CRANFORD *bows, crosses to the place where he put his hat and cloak, snatches them up, and leaves the room. He is followed by BETTERTON, who minces after him, and by WELLS, who shakes BEVERLEY'S hand silently and goes. BATES, throwing a sympathetic glance at his master, follows them out. BEVERLEY stands with hanging head down R. MRS. MINCHANT comes down on tip-toe.*

MRS. M. Shall we not go home now, your ladyship?

LADY B. Yes, Mrs. Minchant, we will go home. (*She looks angrily at BEVERLEY.*) It is not given to us all to see ourselves as others see us. It were well, perhaps, if all women could know in what kind of light they are regarded by the men who profess to love them. For myself I am glad to know that I am not to be won by the love of an honourable gentleman, but only by the weight of his money-bags; not to be won by love, but to be bought by filthy lucre. . . . I shall be obliged by Mr. Beverley calling my chair.

BEVERLEY (*pulling himself together, bowing*). Your pardon, madame. (*He goes out without looking at her.*)

IN THE HAYMARKET.

LADY B. Go you, too, ma'am. I will follow.

MRS. M. But I cannot leave your ladyship——

LADY B. (*stamping her foot*). Do you hear, woman?

MRS. MINCHANT *turns and flies out*. LADY

BETTY *goes up stage and stands looking out of window. A voice goes below singing a song. It dies away as BEVERLEY enters. A clock strikes the half hour. It is echoed by others in the distance.*

BEVERLEY. Madame, your chair is at the door.

LADY B. (*turning*). I thank you, sir. (*She goes down.*) You have lost everything, Mr. Beverley?

BEVERLEY. I have lost you, madame. But before you pass for ever out of my sight let me say some of the things that crowd my heart until it feels like breaking.

LADY B. (*turning her back*). Speak, sir.

BEVERLEY. I love you with all the strength and passion of my soul. I played to-night not to win money with which to cover you with baubles, but just so that I might, if I were so lucky as to secure your hand, lead you to a home befitting your beauty and your delicacy. I have lost, but so long as I live, wherever I may be, my heart will echo with your footsteps, and you will reign there till I die. Thus I am no beggar, but am next richer to the man who makes you wife.

LADY B. (*turning*). Now let me say some of the things that are running rampant in my heart. I am tired of town life and the round of gaiety; I need no home proud in hangings; I want to be where love is. Must your heart merely echo

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with my footsteps? Could you not find room for me, all of me, within it? I want no other home than that.

BEVERLEY (*choking*). Can I believe——

LADY B. (*with a little laugh*). You'll be rather a fool, sir, if you don't. (*She nestles into his arms.*)

BEVERLEY. Betty! Betty!

CURTAIN.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

Cast.

CAPTAIN ARTHUR TOLLER (*late 19th Hussars*).

MAJOR FRANK INGLEBY (*19th Hussars*).

DR. MICHELDENE.

DONELAN.

MARY TOLLER (*Toller's Wife*).

The SCENE is laid in Toller's hunting-box some miles outside Dublin.

Scene: A sitting-room in a hunting box in Ireland. Obviously belongs to a man of sporting instincts. Hunting prints and pictures of horses hang on the walls. Fishing rods, polo clubs, and a gun rack are in evidence. A cavalry sword and a couple of regulation revolvers hang over the mantel-board. Under these there is a framed photograph of a group of officers.

The fireplace is L, and there is a large window R A, door C, and up L A Chesterfield settee R C.

The sun streams in at the windows which overlook a corner of the stables. The door L leads into Toller's bedroom, the one C to the main staircase.

When curtain rises, FRANK INGLEBY, a typical soldier man of about thirty, got up in hunting kit, is sitting on the fender. He takes off his hat and puts it on chair with his crop.

Enter DONELAN, a white-headed kindly faced Irishman, with a soft Dublin brogue,

DONELAN. I beg ye pardon, sorr——

INGLEBY (*warmly*). Not so loud, Donelan.

DONELAN (*sinking his voice and looking round nervously*). Mister O'Hara sent me up to enquire what horse yer honour would be huntin' to-day.

INGLEBY. Tell O'Hara that I'm not hunting to-day.

DONELAN (*puzzles*). Oi will, sorr. (*He turns at door and stops*.) I beg ye pardon, sorr, but is ut because anything has gone wrong wid de master?

INGLEBY. No. So far everything is right.

DONELAN (*fervently*). Ah! Thank God for that, annyway.

INGLEBY. But Mrs. Toller has just told me that the final stage of Captain Toller's treatment was arrived at this morning.

DONELAN (*eagerly*). The bandages are to be removed, sorr?

INGLEBY. Yes. He is to know to-day whether he has recovered his sight, or whether his case is hopeless.

DONELAN. I pray to God He'll be after givin' it him back.

INGLEBY (*chokily*). So do I, my man, with all the strength that's in me. So my place is here, d'y' see. O'Hara had better take the horses out to exercise.

DONELAN. If you cud see ye way to give me a word av hope about the master, sorr, oi should be mighty grateful.

INGLEBY. The odds are five to one against him.

DONELAN. Holy mother! (*crossing to*

TOLLER'S WIFE.

INGLEBY). Phwat did the doctor say when he saw him last night, sorr?

INGLEBY. He's one of the quiet fellers, Donelan. Says little and then regrets having said it. But in the corner of his eye I thought I saw——

DONELAN. Phwat, sorr?

INGLEBY (*putting hand on DONELAN'S arm*). Stacks of hope, Donelan, if I know hope when I see it.

DONELAN. Ah!

INGLEBY. It'll be a great day if the doctor wins. If the Captain had lost an arm or a leg it would have been a small matter. He would have had to leave the regiment just the same——

DONELAN. But, God bless 'im, he would have been able to ride to hounds, and that's the breath of life. Major, dear, did ye ever know such a sport as he is, then, born in the saddle on both sides?

INGLEBY. I know, Donelan. There are few keener soldiers and better huntsmen than Captain Toller. He's had an awful time of it these three years. But for his wife——

DONELAN (*tenderly*). Ah, there's a lady. Her sisters are the angels in heaven.

INGLEBY. Where *is* Mrs. Toller?

DONELAN. Waiting for the doctor below, sorr.

INGLEBY. Then I think I'll go and wait with her.

DONELAN. I should like ye too, sorr.

INGLEBY. I may be able to cheer her up.

DONELAN. Divil a doubt of it, sorr.

INGLEBY *goes out* C, and DONELAN *follows him to the door*.

TOLLER (*within, petulantly*). Donelan. Donelan.

DONELAN (*hurrying to room L*). I'm here, sorr.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

TOLLER. Come in with you.

DONELAN. That I will, sorr. (*He opens door and goes in, leaving it ajar.*)

Enter MRS. TOLLER from C. She stops at door. Her face wears an anxious, drawn look. She comes down with her eyes fixed on door L. Listening intently she is about to go in when she hears TOLLER speak, when she turns and almost runs to door C.

TOLLER (*within*). Mary, Mary (*coming in to the door with bandages over his eyes*), Mary! Where are you going?

MRS. TOLLER (*with sudden cheerfulness*). Nowhere, dearest, here I am. (*She runs to meet him.*)

TOLLER (*with a touch of fretfulness*). Where have you been all this time? I've wanted you frightfully. It's ghastly being all alone.

MRS. TOLLER. I haven't been far away, but the doctor gave strict instructions that you were to be kept very quiet this morning till he arrives.

TOLLER. But why am I to be kept quiet this particular morning?

DONELAN *comes out of bedroom and goes quietly off C, crossing himself reverently as he goes.*

I'm not left alone in that wretched bedroom other mornings. What's the matter with everybody?

MRS. TOLLER. Why, nothing, you fanciful old thing. What should be the matter? Everything's just the same.

TOLLER. Why hasn't Frankie ridden to hounds?

TOLLER'S WIFE.

I've been waitin' to see—to hear him go for the last twenty minutes.

MRS. TOLLER. Hasn't he gone? Are you sure?

He was all ready to go when I saw him last.

TOLLER. You know he hasn't. He was talkin' to Donelan in here till five minutes ago. I heard him go out just before you came in. (*She leads him to chair in front of fire.*)

MRS. TOLLER. Really? He'll be very late. But then he always did move slowly. I expect he hadn't finished his second cigarette. If he doesn't get his two cigarettes after breakfast he is upset for the day. (*She laughs.*)

TOLLER. Then I heard *you* come in and move about the room and hesitate at my door. If I hadn't called you, you would have gone away without coming in to me. Something's up. It's no use trying to put me off. I can feel it in the air. Mary, tell me what it is.

MRS. TOLLER (*kneels by his side*). Dearest, to-day is the day we have all been waiting for.

TOLLER (*under his breath, hoarsely*). My God!

MRS. TOLLER. That's why nobody has been near you all the morning. We were told to keep away so that you shouldn't be excited or worried, and so my poor old boy has been left all to himself for several hours. But all that's nearly over now.

TOLLER (*hoarsely*). Who says so?

MRS. TOLLER. The doctor says so, and I say so. For a little time you will have to be kept in a dark room after your bandages are off. And after that, for a time, you must wear one of

TOLLER'S WIFE.

those big green shades. But what will anything matter when you can see? Eh, darling?

TOLLER (*trying to speak lightly*). It will be a bit of luck—won't it? It's three years, pretty well, since I began tryin' to find my way out of that damned tunnel that had no opening at either end, ain't it, Mary? (*Putting out his hand and feeling for his wife's.*) And you've never left me alone. (*He laughs softly.*) Aren't you the best wife any man in this world ever had—Oh, God, if I might only see your face just once.

MRS. TOLLER (*rising abruptly with a look of sudden fright, and then forcing brightness*). But you will—you'll see everything again, everything.

TOLLER. Who says so?

MRS. TOLLER. The doctor says so, and I say so. It won't be very long before you stand here (*she leads him to window*) and look down on everything that makes life worth living.

TOLLER (*putting out his hands to feel where he is*). Is everything—out there—the same?

MRS. TOLLER. Just the same. Old Merrylegs has got his head stuck out at the stable-door eyeing a white pigeon.

TOLLER. Good old Merrylegs.

MRS. TOLLER. Beautyboy, Rattler, Magic, and Mars are just going out for exercise.

TOLLER. I can hear them. (*He waves his hand.*) Morning, boys!

MRS. TOLLER. And there's O'Hara just mounting with a grin from ear to ear.

TOLLER (*laughing*). He's a rum little cove. Does

he still wear that old red handkerchief twisted round his neck?

MRS. TOLLER. Yes, it's the same old handkerchief.

TOLLER. Aren't the dogs going out?

MRS. TOLLER. They've just rushed out of the stable.

TOLLER. Where's Buster?

MRS. TOLLER. Looking up at you and wagging the place where his tail ought to be.

TOLLER. Good old Buster—Nothing altered, eh?

MRS. TOLLER. Nothing. You'll find no difference in anything or anybody. The same old dandelion is waving its yellow head on top of the wall, and the very same martins are building their little houses under the eaves.

TOLLER (*chokily*). God bless 'em all. (*He turns suddenly to his wife and puts his arms round her.*) Shall I find that you have altered, Mary?

MRS. TOLLER (*the look of fright again on her face*). I? Why should I have altered?

TOLLER. Because I've given you a jolly bad time these three years, my dear. It'll hit me pretty hard if I find that I've put any grey in your beautiful black hair.

MRS. TOLLER (*involuntarily putting her hand up to her fair hair*). You won't, you won't. (*She gives a little hysterical laugh.*) I am the same to-day as when you married me.

TOLLER. What a brick you were to marry a poor devil of a blind man.

MRS. TOLLER (*putting her arms round him*). I loved you. I shall always love you.

TOLLER. Do you think I don't know that. But lots of times when I've been staring into the dark, something that you said seems to stand out in burning letters.

MRS. TOLLER. Something that *I* said?

TOLLER. Yes. A man with anything the matter with him is very horrible to you, you said.

MRS. TOLLER. If I said that——

TOLLER. You did say it. It was three weeks before poor old Merrylegs fell with me, and I got this. (*Touches his bandages.*)

MRS. TOLLER. Then it was a very foolish remark, and I didn't mean it. I'm afraid I said many foolish things in those days. But don't let us look back. Let us look forward. No more dismals. Take that doleful line out of your forehead. I shall get a nice dressing down from the doctor, if he finds that I've depressed you. Come along and sit down, and I'll give you a cigarette. (*She guides TOLLER to settee.*)

TOLLER (*anxiously*). Oughtn't the doctor to be here by now?

MRS. TOLLER. Never mind about the doctor. Here you are. (*She gives cigarette.*) Don't spill the ash all over your clothes. O'Mally pitched into me the other day because your clothes were in such a state.

TOLLER. What does it matter?

MRS. TOLLER. It matters a good deal. And, by the way, I must send a letter to your tailor-man. You'll want some new riding things now, won't you?

TOLLER (*eagerly*). Shall I?

TOLLER'S WIFE.

MRS. TOLLER. Of course you will. And what's the name of your bootmaker?

TOLLER. Bumble.

MRS. TOLLER. He ought to be a honey merchant with a name like that. Think of the delight of getting into tops again, eh, dearest?

TOLLER. By gad, yes. (*Uneasily.*) I wish to goodness the doctor would come.

MRS. TOLLER. Don't worry about the doctor. Take that line out of your forehead immediately. Do you know that you'll be just in time for the last two runs of the season.

TOLLER. By Jove, do you think I shall?

MRS. TOLLER. Why, of course you will. By the time you get rid of your green shade you'll be out on Merrylegs again. I shall come too, of course, and so will Frank. What a merry trio we shall be.

TOLLER. For God's sake don't paint pictures that may never come true.

Enter INGLEBY C.

MRS. TOLLER. They will come true, they *are* coming true.

TOLLER (*gripping the arm of the settee*). Is that the doctor?

INGLEBY. Hullo, old fellow.

TOLLER (*relieved*). Oh, hullo, Frankie.

MRS. TOLLER. My dear Frankie, aren't you hunting to-day?

INGLEBY. Not to-day.

TOLLER. Sorry if I've spoilt your game, old man.

INGLEBY. Not a bit, my dear chap, I've had my whack.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

Enter DONELAN C.

DONELAN. I beg ye pardon, madame——

MRS. TOLLER. What is it, Donelan?

TOLLER gives a start.

DONELAN. The doctor's below, and if ye plase, would like a word wid ye.

MRS. TOLLER. Very well. I'll come at once.

Exit DONELAN.

TOLLER (*rising and feeling his way C to MRS. T.*).
Mary!

MRS. TOLLER. Yes, dearest.

TOLLER (*in a low voice*). Do you think I shall pull through? Don't try and bolster me up if you don't think so. Tell me the truth.

MRS. TOLLER. I never was so sure of anything in my life. When your bandages are off to-day you will see once more (*cheerfully*). Just look at him, isn't he an object? Ash from head to foot. (*She brushes him down and kisses him cheerfully.*)

TOLLER (*softly*). Come back soon.

MRS. TOLLER. In five minutes. (*Exit C.*)

INGLEBY. How do you feel, old son?

TOLLER. Full of beans, old man. She's—she's a wonder. I've never been accused of ~~fun~~king before, but when Mary told me just now that my bandages were to come off to-day, I—I felt a bit jumpy, I can tell you.

INGLEBY. Don't wonder.

TOLLER. But she's been bucking me up and I'm ready for it—good or bad. It's always the woman who shines like a new coin in a crisis, ain't it?

INGLEBY. Yes, and when they're not mothers or wives, they're nurses.

TOLLER. Every woman's a nurse at heart. Look at Mary. My dear feller, when I first knew her she was one of those sensitive gels who cover their faces at the sight of anything unpleasant. Awfully frightened of pain. Ran away from anybody who had had an accident.

INGLEBY. She's changed pretty much since then!

TOLLER. Rather. From the very moment she heard I was blind she came up to the scratch like a good 'un, and by Jove, old man, she's stuck to me. Night and day she's been ready. There have been times when I've gibbed a bit. It's no fun groping through the months in the dark, and I've had my bad hours. But for her I don't believe I should have won through some of 'em. Jolly bad luck for her to be tied to a cripple, what?

INGLEBY. *She* doesn't think so, old man.

TOLLER. I know. By Jove, I'll make up for it all to her when I get my eyes again, and I'm going to do so. She's certain about it! She's never wrong.

INGLEBY. That's the way to look at it, old feller.

TOLLER. She thinks I shall spend my days huntin' and shootin', leavin' her at home. She's not right there. I'm going to make her my first thought. I'm goin' to try and prove how deep my gratitude is, God bless her—you don't mind my goin' on like this, do you, old man?

INGLEBY. My *dear* feller!

TOLLER. It's on my chest and it does me good to

tell somebody. I couldn't very well say these things to her.

INGLEBY. I should be pretty sick if you didn't open up to me, after all these years.

TOLLER. Thanks, old man. I say.

INGLEBY. Well.

TOLLER. Is she as beautiful as ever?

INGLEBY. Rather.

TOLLER. The anxiety and that kind of thing hasn't told on her much, has it?

INGLEBY. She hasn't altered a bit.

TOLLER. By Jove, and what about her hair? Is it as black as ever?

INGLEBY (*surprised*). Black? Er—well——

TOLLER. For the Lord's sake don't say she's gone grey.

INGLEBY. No—she isn't grey.

TOLLER. That's all right.

Horses' can be heard walking by under the window.

The gees!

He springs to his feet and feels his way to the window, banging into a chair on the way.

My beauties!

He laughs to hide his emotion.

We'll show them the way again pretty soon, won't we? How do they look, Frankie?

INGLEBY. Fit as you make 'em, old man.

TOLLER. It'll be only natural, I suppose, if they don't remember me.

DOCTOR *enters with* MRS. TOLLER, C. *He is a quiet, clean-shaven man, decisive and brisk.*

Hillo, Doc.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

DOCTOR. Ah, good morning !

TOLLER. Mary.

MRS. TOLLER (*crossing to him and taking his hand*).

Here I am.

DOCTOR. Good morning, Major.!

INGLEBY. Good morning, sir !

DOCTOR. Beautiful morning.

MRS. TOLLER. Spring is here.

TOLLER. Yes, I can smell it. There's blossom in the air.

DOCTOR. A pleasant time of year. Well, when you're ready, Toller.

TOLLER. Ready as soon as you are, Doc.

DOCTOR. Good. I'll just go in and see to things. Mrs. Toller, the blinds must be down in this room, please.

MRS. TOLLER. They shall be, Doctor.

INGLEBY (*up with DOC.*). Is there any chance ?

DOC. *silently holds up his hands. Then enters bedroom.*

TOLLER. Frank.

INGLEBY. Hullo !

TOLLER. I say, stand by Mary, old man, will you ?

INGLEBY. Why, of course !

MRS. TOLLER (*nervously*). No. Please don't trouble, I shall be perfectly right. I'm not a bit anxious.

TOLLER. I know, but I want you to sit here with Frank. It'll worry me if I think of you waiting all alone and wondering what's going to happen.

DOCTOR (*standing at bedroom door*). Come, Toller.

TOLLER (*under his breath*). Oh God, I funk it.

MRS. TOLLER. Darling, it's all coming right. I

TOLLER'S WIFE.

knew that it's all coming right. Kiss me before you go in. Remember this, whatever happens don't forget that I have always loved you, and shall love you till I die.

TOLLER (*holding her tight*). As for me, my own Mary, I love you more than my sight, more than my life. So long as I have you nothing matters.

They straighten up.

INGLEBY. Good luck, old man.

TOLLER (*shaking his hand*). Thanks, old feller. Oh yes, I'm going to be as right as rain.

MRS. TOLLER *leads him up to door R. She flings her arms round his neck and the DOCTOR takes his hand. The door closes. All her brightness has gone. She is a sobbing, distracted, distraught woman. Seeing this, INGLEBY turns his back sympathetically upon her and quietly crosses to the window and pulls down the blind.*

MRS. TOLLER is sobbing as though her heart was breaking. INGLEBY goes up to her, places her in a chair C.

INGLEBY (*very sympathetically*). He is in good hands, Mary.

MRS. TOLLER. I have said good-bye to him.

INGLEBY. Oh, but that wasn't necessary. You'll see him again soon, you know.

MRS. TOLLER. I shall never see him again.

INGLEBY. Oh, my dear Mary. You're tired and overwrought, naturally.

MRS. TOLLER (*trying to control herself*). No.

INGLEBY. It's a most anxious time.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

MRS. TOLLER. Yes.

INGLEBY. Poor old fellow. It's been a very terrible time for him. But his pluck has been magnificent.

MRS. TOLLER (*hardly seeming to know what she is saying*). Yes.

INGLEBY. He has never lost heart, has he?

MRS. TOLLER. No.

INGLEBY. He was talking just now like a man with nothing the matter with him. He seemed to have forgotten that he had been obliged to give up the Service and chuck everything. It's extraordinary.

MRS. TOLLER. Yes.

INGLEBY. In any case, whether the treatment is a success or not, he has got himself well in hand.

MRS. TOLLER. Yes.

INGLEBY. He told me that his blind years with you had been the happiest in his life.

MRS. TOLLER (*piteously*). Did he say that?

INGLEBY. Yes, Mary, and more.

MRS. TOLLER. Did he say that I had been good to him?

INGLEBY. I should think so.

MRS. TOLLER. Did he say that he had loved me?

INGLEBY. Many times.

MRS. TOLLER. He will never love me any more.

INGLEBY. Oh, my dear friend, you mustn't allow yourself to get into such a state of mind as this.

MRS. TOLLER. Never! Never!

INGLEBY. Perhaps I'd better—— (*Makes movement to-door*).

MRS. TOLLER (*recovering a little and sitting again*).

No, don't go. I want your help. I am not mad or delirious. I am only a woman in great trouble.

INGLEBY. Trouble?

MRS. TOLLER. I have deceived Arthur.

INGLEBY. In what way, Mary?

MRS. TOLLER. I am *not* Mary.

INGLEBY. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MRS. TOLLER. Can I put it more plainly than that? I am *not* Mary. I am not the woman Arthur thinks that he has married.

INGLEBY. Oh, but I know that you are, my dear Mrs. Toller. You are Mary Ackworth.

MRS. TOLLER. No, I am not Mary Ackworth, I am Alice Ackworth.

INGLEBY (*startled*). Alice Ackworth!

MRS. TOLLER. Yes, and Arthur was engaged to Mary, and all these years he thinks that he has been married to Mary. Now do you see why I cry aloud to God for mercy. Can't you see now why I am afraid?

INGLEBY. Good God! That's morbid. I don't think you ought to talk like this. Suppose he gets back his sight?

MRS. TOLLER. He will.

INGLEBY. Think how gloriously happy he will be. Think of it. After three years he will see his wife.

MRS. TOLLER (*repeating mechanically*). After three years he will see his wife.

INGLEBY. And that will be the greatest of his joys.

MRS. TOLLER. And that will be the greatest of his—sorrows.

INGLEBY. You don't know what you're saying. You're overtired, worn out. You must know

that he only wants to see you to be the happiest man in the world.

MRS. TOLLER. — He only wants to see me to be the most wretched man in the world. (*Suddenly breaking down in an agony of despair, and falling forward on her knees.*) Oh, my God, my God, don't give him back his sight, don't let him see me. If I have never done anything to deserve pity till now, I beseech you to have mercy! Dear God, keep him blind for his own sake, keep him in the dark for both our sakes. I have made him happy. I will serve him like a slave. My hands shall be in his all the days of his life. I will wait upon him and comfort him. He shall be my child, my idol. Don't give him back his sight. Don't let him see my face.

INGLEBY *stares at her in amazement. There is a distinct pause.*

INGLEBY (*gently*). I think—I'm afraid I—

MRS. TOLLER. Until Doctor Micheldene came to try and bring back Arthur's sight, I gave no thought to having changed places with my sister. Although Arthur was blind I made him happy. It was my work and my joy to make him see the sun and the flowers through my eyes, and I did it. I was more than his wife, and he was more than my husband. We were very happy. But the moment the doctor came my happiness turned to fear. I long for him to see again, but I dread what will happen when he does. What will he say when he finds that I am not Mary but Alice, when all this time he believes that I am Mary.

INGLEBY (*with a gasp*). But—are you sure you are not labouring under some dreadful delusion brought about by your anxiety?

MRS. TOLLER. I wish I were, Frank Ingleby.

INGLEBY. But, it seems so incredible. How was it possible for him to marry you when he thought—and everybody else must have thought—that he was marrying your sister?

MRS. TOLLER. My sister and I are the same height and the same build. Our voices are alike. But I am fair, and she is dark.

INGLEBY. He asked me if your hair was still as black as ever?

MRS. TOLLER. He thinks that I am Mary. He thinks that I am Mary.

INGLEBY. But how is it that people haven't told him?

MRS. TOLLER. We were not well known. We were very poor and knew nobody. My sister went to relations in India the day after the accident.

INGLEBY. Why?

MRS. TOLLER. She was afraid. The thought of living with a blind man frightened her—got on her nerves. She is one of those women who dreads feeling or seeing pain.

INGLEBY. She couldn't have loved him much.

MRS. TOLLER. She didn't. She was attracted by his fearlessness, his courage, his enthusiasm. That was all—I had *always* loved him.

INGLEBY. And when she went away you took her place?

MRS. TOLLER. Oh, so gladly, so thankfully.

INGLEBY. He loves *you*. He adores *you*. He may call you Mary, or Alice, or any other name.

TOLLER'S WIFE.

What does the name count? It is the woman he loves. Why are you afraid?

MRS. TOLLER (*rising and going towards INGLEBY who is sitting*). I can't face him. I know what will be the look in his eyes when he sees me. He will stare at me as though I were a stranger and ask me if I know where Mary, his Mary, has gone? Oh, my God, what am I to do, where am I to hide myself?

INGLEBY. What's to be done? (*Joining her.*)

MRS. TOLLER. You are his friend. You love him too. You must help me.

INGLEBY. I *will* help you. I will tell him.

MRS. TOLLER. Yes, yes, tell him everything.

INGLEBY. I will tell him that your sister went to India.

MRS. TOLLER. One day after the accident—because she was afraid.

INGLEBY. That's it. That she didn't love him——

MRS. TOLLER. And that I did, and that, besides, loving him I dreaded what might happen to him after his accident if his marriage had been——

INGLEBY. Broken up. Yes. I will.

MRS. TOLLER. Try and say a good word for me. Tell him that I will not come back until he sends for me.

INGLEBY. Yes, yes.

MRS. TOLLER. And that I shall wait on my knees.

INGLEBY. Yes, I will.

MRS. TOLLER. Ask him to have mercy on me as God as had mercy on him.

*The bedroom door is flung open. TOLLER
rushes in.*

TOLLER'S WIFE.

TOLLER (*coming down*). Mary! I can see! I can see! We've won, won!—Mary, Mary!

She turns slowly and faces him. He goes down to take her in his arms. INGLEBY goes up to bedroom as the DOCTOR appears and goes in with him, shutting the door. MRS. TOLLER stands like a statue with her eyes fixed on TOLLER. He stops as he gets to her and falters, half pronounces her name, and stands looking at her, at first in a kind of confusion at believing a stranger to be his wife, then with a kind of wonder, then with a growing understanding, and finally with a gasp of realisation.

TOLLER (*in a low voice*). Then—she hadn't the pluck after all.

MRS. TOLLER. No. She—hadn't the pluck—after all.

TOLLER. She was afraid of marrying a cripple.

MRS. TOLLER. Yes, she was afraid of marrying a cripple (*bursting into a paroxysm of tears and falling on her knees*). Forgive me, I loved you so. I was so sorry. Don't send me away, don't send me out of your sight, keep me with you, let me be near you.

TOLLER (*lifting her up*). Oh, you great-hearted, unselfish, pure, sweet soul, you are the woman I love, you are my wife, there is no other woman under the sun. I have you locked up safe in my heart, and I have lost the key.

She flings her arms round his neck still sobbing.

[CURTAIN.]

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S
COURT.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

Characters.

MR. HENRY ROBERTSON (*in the Civil Service*).

HARRY (*his only son*).

ARTHUR TILNEY (*a friend*).

MRS. ROBERTSON..

PHYLLIS (*her daughter*).

BERYL MACMURDO (*her friend*).

COOKIE.

Scene : This is laid in the sitting-room of the ROBERTSON'S house in Pelham Square, Earl's Court.

It is an ordinary comfortable room, with door R, fireplace L. A large arm-chair above fireplace. A table to the R of it, upon which there is a reading lamp, and a large workbasket C. R of table another chair. Up stage C, there is a card table, with three chairs. Two candles are burning on it, and there are bridge markers also upon it, and two packs of cards.

When curtain rises, Mr. ROBERTSON, a kindly, shrewd, grey-headed man in spectacles, is sitting in arm-chair reading. He is in evening clothes, but wears an old shooting coat and bedroom slippers. Sitting in chair on the other side of table is Mrs. ROBERTSON, a sweet-faced women of about forty-eight, in an evening blouse, mending holes in a pair of socks.

Round the table, playing dummy, are PHYLLIS, BERYL, and ARTHUR TILNEY.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

PHYLLIS is a pretty, rather slangy, keenly observant girl. BERYL is a charming, quiet, self-reliant girl, and ARTHUR TILNEY a good-looking, impetuous young fellow of about twenty-five. The girls wear pretty evening frocks, and the boys evening clothes and a dinner jacket.

BERYL. Three tricks—thanks to dummy's trumps.

PHYLLIS. Thanks to Arthur's appalling foozling, you mean.

BERYL. Did he foozle ?

PHYLLIS. Did you see his discards—I ask you ?

ARTHUR (*quickly*). That was the new Badminton discard. It's played at every decent Club.

PHYLLIS. It may be minton. There's no question about it's being jolly bad.

ARTHUR (*gathering up cards*). Why didn't you play the seven of diamonds ?

PHYLLIS. For the simple reason that I hadn't got it. You had it.

ARTHUR. Well, why didn't you ask for it ?

PHYLLIS (*dealing*). Because I didn't want it.

MRS. ROBERTSON. Oh, don't quarrel, dears.

MR. ROBERTSON. They're not quarrelling, my love. They're playing Bridge, the silent game.

PHYLLIS. Cue for general laughter. (*She pretends to laugh heartily, the others join in irritably.*)

MRS. ROBERTSON (*to her husband*). Harry's late to-night.

MR. ROBERTSON. Yes, there is no doubt about it. He *is* late ; but he's not been run over by a motor-omnibus or blown up on the tube.

MRS. ROBERTSON. I wish you didn't find it necessary to make fun of me, Henry.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

MR. ROBERTSON (*stretching out a hand and laying it on his wife's, tenderly*). Fun of you! My dear, if the truth must be told, I'm rather worried about the boy myself, and I made a feeble attempt to be merry and bright.

MRS. ROBERTSON (*anxiously*). Ah! So you've worried too! Why? What have you noticed?

PHYLLIS. Leave it to you, partner.

ARTHUR. Hearts.

PHYLLIS. Oh, help!

ARTHUR. No comments permitted.

PHYLLIS. That wasn't a comment. That was merely an involuntary exclamation of despair.

BERYL. Look at dummy! Five hearts to the king.

PHYLLIS. That settles it. (*She rises, and turns her chair round three times.*)

MR. ROBERTSON. Two nights after Beryl came to stay, I found Harry walking about his room gloomily an hour after he'd said good night.

MRS. ROBERTSON. That was because he was so anxious for news of the examination, poor boy.

MR. ROBERTSON. No. I suggested that, but he said, "Oh, bosh! *I've* passed all right. It's indigestion;" and he more or less shot me out of the room. But when I listened at his door after I'd had my bath, he was still pacing about.

MRS. ROBERTSON. Oh dear, oh dear. There's certainly something on his mind. Is it money?

MR. ROBERTSON. No. I asked him this morning if he was hard up. He said he had plenty.

MRS. ROBERTSON. What do you think is the

matter? He was in the highest spirits a week ago, making all sorts of plans for the future, when he should be a full-blown doctor.

MR. ROBERTSON. He worked very hard for the exam., and he's suffering from the reaction. Waiting for news is very trying. Like a good chap, his great ambition is to begin to earn money, so that he shan't be any longer a strain upon my anæmic Government Office purse. That's all. Directly he hears that he is through he'll be all right again.

MRS. ROBERTSON. I do hope so. He's been quite short with me the last day or two, and he seems to stay away from home as much as he can.

Enter the COOK, an odd little figure, elderly, familiar, quarrellous, good-hearted.

COOK. Here's a telegram.

MR. R., MRS. R., PHYLLIS. A telegram!

MR. ROBERTSON. Who's it for?

COOK. Harry Robertson, it's got on it. It's for the boy, I suppose. No 'Enery is called 'Arry after 'e's settled darn and 'ad a child.

MR. ROBERTSON. Give it to me, please.

COOK (*peering at it*). I think it says 'Arry. What I wish the Post Office did was to stamp telegrams with a post-mark, then you could pretty well guess 'oo they was from.

MR. ROBERTSON. Will you give me that telegram?

COOK. Well, I brought it in for you. But don't you go opening it unless you're sure it's for you.

MR. ROBERTSON (*taking it*). I will use my own discretion, Cook, thank you. It is for Harry.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

MRS. ROBERTSON (*excitedly*). It's about the examination.

PHYLLIS. Oh, father, do open it, please do.

MR. ROBERTSON. It is not addressed to me.

PHYLLIS. Oh, that's splitting straws. It *must* be about the exam., and therefore it's addressed to the family.

MRS. ROBERTSON. I think you might, Henry.

BERYL. Do, Mr. Robertson.

ARTHUR. If you do we could give Harry a rousing reception.

COOK. Yuss, and what price puttin' up the Mafekin' flags.

MR. ROBERTSON (*who has been fingering the telegram eagerly*). No, no. (*He rises.*) This contains news that will affect Harry's whole life. He would prefer to open it himself.

COOK. Well, as I bank on his 'avin' passed, I shall trot off and get one of my special cakes all ready. Oh, what a night! (*She gives a hop and a skip, breaks into a cascade of shrill chuckles, and runs off.*)

MR. ROBERTSON (*rising and going to mantel-piece*). I'll put it here, where it will catch his eye.

PHYLLIS. You mustn't use the simple word eye when speaking of Dr. Robertson, father. You must say the globe or ball movable in the orbit.

MRS. ROBERTSON (*laughing excitedly*). Yes, we must choose our words very carefully before the doctor.

MR. ROBERTSON. We don't know that he is a doctor yet. The telegram may say he's failed.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

PHYLLIS. Who'll take sixpence to a rotten orange that it doesn't?

MRS. ROBERTSON. My dear child, don't use such vulgar expressions.

PHYLLIS. Why should a rotten orange be any more vulgar than a sleepy apple, or a bad potato? My dear mother, don't fall a victim to the code of manners of the Earl's Court Road.

Enter COOK.

COOK (*in a loud whisper*). Now then, quick, are you in or out?

MRS. ROBERTSON. Why? Surely no one has called at this hour?

COOK. Yuss, the vicar.

MRS. ROBERTSON. The vicar!

COOK. So seein' as 'ow he 'ad on his beggin' expression, I thought I'd better ask.

MR. ROBERTSON (*hesitatingly*). What do you think, dear?

PHYLLIS. He's collecting for the widows and orphans of missionaries made soup of by West African epicures.

MRS. ROBERTSON. I think we'd better be in.

COOK. In? Right—very feeble! (*She goes out.*)

MR. ROBERTSON. Well then, let's get it over. (*He draws his hand out of his pocket.*) I've just got five shillings.

MRS. ROBERTSON. Fancy Cook answering the door! Her curiosity is too wonderful. (*She goes to door.*)

MR. ROBERTSON. Don't let him sit down or he'll stay the whole evening.

MRS. ROBERTSON. He *must* sit down. (*They go out.*)

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

PHYLLIS. Arthur.

ARTHUR. Yes?

PHYLLIS. May I ask whether you're playing Bridge or Beggar-my-neighbour?

BERYL. Why? What's he doing?

PHYLLIS. Playing a wonderful and hideous game.

ARTHUR. Sorry. My mind's not on the game to-night. 'Er—would you mind reading this note? It's private. (*He hands her a slip of paper.*)

PHYLLIS. Oh, how touching. Private!—Is it proper? (*Reads aloud.*) "Will you please leave me alone with Miss MacMurdo, and guard the door for ten minutes? I want to propose." (*She explodes with laughter.*)

ARTHUR (*frightfully confused*). Oh, look here! Dash it.

BERYL (*rising, also confused*). I think we might have a little music now.

PHYLLIS (*rising and holding her arm*). No, no. Stay and see it out. I've saved him all the preliminary beating about the bush. All he's got to do is to ask you yes or no, and all you've got to do is to say one or the other. It's quite easy. I'll keep cave for ten minutes. Be brave, and let who will be brilliant. *Exit.*

There is a brief, uncomfortable silence, BERYL remains standing, running her fingers through the cards on the table. ARTHUR remains standing also, touching his tie nervously.

ARTHUR. What did you think of the pictures in the Anglo-British Exhibition?

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

BERYL. Very good indeed, thank you. I mean——

ARTHUR. It's all right. I quite understand.

BERYL (*laughs softly*). I don't know how *you* feel,
I feel that I should like to be in the cellar, even
among the beetles.

ARTHUR. I did, when Phyllis was idiot enough to
read that thing aloud. I'm awfully sorry.

BERYL. I don't mind a bit. In fact, I believe I'm
glad. It does save me from listening to an
immense amount of remarks that have nothing
to do with the subject.

ARTHUR. Yes, but she hasn't made it any easier for
me. I've still got to make the plunge. May I?

BERYL. Yes—I think so.

ARTHUR. I love you. Will you marry me?

BERYL (*with a laugh*). This is where I sit down.
(*She sits down.*)

ARTHUR. Why? Are you shocked?

BERYL. How could I be? It's a perfectly proper
question.

ARTHUR. Then what do you mean?

BERYL. Well, I want to think about it.

ARTHUR. Think about it? Good Heavens, it isn't
a thing that bears thinking about!

BERYL. I know it isn't with most people. That's
why there are so many unhappy marriages.

ARTHUR. But do you love me? You know that
without having to think, don't you, Beryl?

BERYL. Yes, I do.

ARTHUR (*bending forward*). Yes you do, what?

BERYL. Why love you, of course.

ARTHUR. Oh, hurrah! Then you'll marry me!
Beryl! (*He puts his arms out.*)

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

BERYL (*pushes them away*). Not too fast. Wait a minute.

ARTHUR. I can't wait. You've said that you love me. I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels!

BERYL. You're on your heels, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Oh, do be serious. This means so much to me.

BERYL. It means even more to me. That's why I'm more serious than I've ever been before. I *do* love you——

ARTHUR. Beryl!

BERYL. But I'm not at all certain that I love you well enough to marry you.

ARTHUR (*aghast*). But if you love me of course you love me well enough to marry me.

BERYL. Not at all. I love five men just as much as I love you.

ARTHUR. What!

BERYL. How do I know that one of them isn't the man I want to marry.

ARTHUR. Five men? Who are they?

BERYL. Four you don't know, and the fifth is Harry Robertson. I can't possibly make up my mind to-night.

ARTHUR. I don't want you to make up your mind. I don't agree with a girl having a mind.

BERYL. Be careful, Master Arthur!

ARTHUR. Oh dash it, I don't mean that. What I mean is that I think a man ought to make up a girl's mind for her. Let me make up your mind for you.

BERYL. But what's the good of my having a mind

if someone else makes it up for me? It's like having a piano and letting the next door neighbour play on it.

PHYLLIS (*putting her head in*). Through with it yet?

ARTHUR. No. Go away!

PHYLLIS. Well, hurry up. (*She goes out and shuts the door*).

ARTHUR. Oh, good Lord, I'm getting jumpy.

BERYL. But that's absurd. This is a moment when you ought to be absolutely calm and collected. Excitement and haste may mean years of misery.

ARTHUR. Years of misery! Married to you!

BERYL. Well, years of misery for me, then. Evidently I don't count so long as you're happy.

ARTHUR. You couldn't love me if you thought I was that sort of creature! I think about you far more than I think about myself.

BERYL. It's very nice of you, but that's the way to become an angel, and if you become an angel you can't possibly marry me.

ARTHUR. Why not?

BERYL. Because there is no giving in marriage in heaven, and I hope it will be years before I join you there.

ARTHUR. How long have I got to wait before you make up your mind?

BERYL. Until I am quite certain that I can't marry Harry Robertson, Aubrey Reckett, Gerald Handers, Cyril Law, and Charlie Hackett.

ARTHUR. Have they asked you to marry them?

BERYL. No, but they all will as soon as I give them a moonlight opportunity.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

ARTHUR. And, good Lord, before you come round to me again you may have met and loved another five men.

BERYL. I know. It *is* difficult, isn't it?

ARTHUR (*strongly*). I insist on your marrying me! Do you hear?

BERYL. I like you more than ever for adopting the strong man tone, Arthur dear, but unfortunately Cupid has not yet shot an arrow into my heart. He has sent plenty of arrows at me, but has always missed the bull.

ARTHUR (*miserably*). Where did he shoot for me?

BERYL. I'm afraid you're an outer, old boy.

ARTHUR. Will you give me a kiss to go on with until you make up your mind?

BERYL. Of course I will.

She holds up her face. ARTHUR bends and kisses her cheek. HARRY ROBERTSON enters. He comes in quickly, and eagerly, sees ARTHUR kiss BERYL, and draws up sharply, with an expression of pain and anger.

HARRY. I'm sorry. Why didn't you put a notice on the door?

BERYL. It doesn't matter in the least, thanks.

Enter MR. and MRS. ROBERTSON and PHYLLIS, all with suppressed excitement.

MRS. ROBERTSON. When did you get back, darling?

PHYLLIS. How long have you been in?

MR. ROBERTSON. Well, my boy, here you are then!

HARRY (*staring round*). What's the excitement?

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

MRS. ROBERTSON. There's a telegram for you, dearest.

HARRY (*eagerly*). A telegram? (*In a carefully ordinary voice.*) From Bartlett, I suppose, asking me down for a week-end.

PHYLLIS (*tartly*). You know you don't think it's anything of the sort.

MR. ROBERTSON (*handing it to HARRY*). We thought that it might be about your exam., old man.

HARRY. Oh, that thing. Been playing Bridge?

BERYL. Yes, dummy.

ARTHUR. Held rather good hands.

HARRY. All the hearts, I see.

MRS. ROBERTSON. Won't you open your telegram, darling?

HARRY. Any time will do, mother.

PHYLLIS. Well, I never thought that *you* were sidey! For goodness sake open it and put us out of our misery.

HARRY (*to BERYL*). I met Cyril Law to-day. He asked to be remembered to you.

BERYL. Oh, dear old Cyril.

HARRY. Yes, he's pretty long in the few teeth he has left, isn't he?

PHYLLIS. A nice sweet remark! You obviously like him.

HARRY. I've never thought about him. He's merely a drab wall to me.

MR. ROBERTSON. You might just see if that telegram is about the exam., old chap.

Enter COOK. She fusses about, pretending to be busy.

HARRY. It isn't, father. It's only from some idiot who has spent sixpence because he couldn't be bothered to write a card that would have cost a halfpenny. This room seems popular to-night.

PHYLLIS. Oh, I can't stand this. (*She whips the telegram out of HARRY'S hand, opens it and reads it.*) "Congrats, old man. You top the list of passes. E. G. Lloyd."

MRS. ROBERTSON (*flinging her arms round HARRY'S neck*). Oh, my darling boy.

MR. ROBERTSON (*seizing his hand*). Well done Harry.

PHYLLIS. Played indeed!

BERYL. Oh, I'm so glad.

ARTHUR. So am I. Simply delighted.

COOKIE (*flinging up her arms*). Now then, all together, hip-hip——

MR. ROBERTSON, PHYLLIS, ARTHUR. Hurrah!

HARRY. Oh, good Lord!

MRS. ROBERTSON (*tearfully*). Dr. Robertson. Dr Robertson. And at the head of the list.

MR. ROBERTSON. This is something to have lived for.

HARRY. Thanks very much. Er—isn't the drawing-room going to be used to-night?

MR. ROBERTSON. Yes, let's all go and play and sing.

MRS. ROBERTSON. Yes, come along, Beryl; come along, Arthur. Phyllis, run and light the candles on the piano.

COOK. I will. "Oh, it's all right in the summer-time, the summer-time"——

Exit

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

PHYLLIS *follows with a shriek of laughter, pulling off BERYL.*

MRS. ROBERTSON. Come along, darling.

HARRY. Later, mother. I want a word with father.

MR. ROBERTSON. Yes, exactly.

MRS. ROBERTSON. All right. But not too many words. (*She kisses him again.*) Come along, Arthur. (*She goes out.*)

ARTHUR. I'm afraid I must be going.

HARRY. Oh!

ARTHUR. I must write a letter or two for the last post. Well, I can't tell you how glad I am that you've done so frightfully well.

HARRY. Thanks. Good night. (*He turns away.*)

ARTHUR. Good night, Mr. Robertson.

MR. ROBERTSON. I'll see you out.

They go out together. HARRY left alone, remains standing quite still. A girl's voice singing to piano accompaniment can be heard. He listens and then goes sharply across the room and shuts the door. He goes to the card table where BERYL was sitting and picks up her cards tenderly, then flings them down. Enter MR. ROBERTSON. He leaves the door open.

MR. ROBERTSON (*coming down and holding out his hand*). Harry, old boy. (*There is a note of great emotion in his voice.*)

HARRY (*shakes hands*). It was raining when I came in.

MR. ROBERTSON (*blowing his nose*). Glass has been going down all day. Shall we smoke a pipe?

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

HARRY. Try some of this. (*He hands his pouch.*)

MR. ROBERTSON. Looks good.

HARRY. It isn't bad. (*The singing has been heard through this.* HARRY goes and shuts the door with a bang.)

MR. ROBERTSON (*standing with his back to the fireplace*). The next thing to do, is to look out for a partnership for you. What do you think? Town or country? (*He lights a match.*)

HARRY. Neither. I shan't practise.

MR. ROBERTSON. What!—Oh, I see. You mean you'll take up a hospital appointment.

HARRY. As a matter of fact, I don't, father. I'm going to chuck doctoring.

MR. ROBERTSON (*with a gasp of amazement*). Chuck—doctoring?

HARRY. Yes. (*He gives a laugh.*) Sounds almost funny, doesn't it, after working for it and passing?

MR. ROBERTSON. The word funny doesn't seem to me to be the one.

HARRY. No, I suppose it doesn't. Call it ingratitude, waste of time and money, whatever you like. They are all the right words. I'm very sorry about it, but there it is. I'm a fool, and you can't alter me.

MR. ROBERTSON. I think you owe me some sort of explanation, Harry.

HARRY. Yes, I do. I was working to do well in my M.D. for two reasons. First because I wanted to show you that I understood and was—awfully grateful to you for having gone without things to pay my fees and keep me.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

MR. ROBERTSON. Thanks, old man.

HARRY. And second—Well, that's it. The second reason has suddenly crumbled. I've worked for nothing as far as that's concerned. I didn't know until just now.

MR. ROBERTSON. Just now? Since you've been in?

HARRY. Yes. Don't ask me what it is. It sounds feeble enough. But I'm the sort of idiot who goes in for building up castles in the air, and a castle is no good to me unless the right person is going to share it with me. I've made a hopeless mistake, and so I shall chuck everything and go out to Canada, or somewhere, and get on to something else.

Enter BERYL.

BERYL. I know I'm disturbing you, but I was told to ask you both to come into the drawing-room.

MR. ROBERTSON (*looks from her to HARRY and smiles*). Oh yes, the drawing-room. To be sure. (*He goes out shutting the door.*)

BERYL. And so you've passed.

HARRY. Why don't you go into the drawing-room?

BERYL (*sitting down*). I want to be alone with you. Do you object?

HARRY (*scornfully*). Alone with me! Bosh.

BERYL. It was no surprise and no news to me that Mr. Lloyd telegraphed. I knew you'd pass.

HARRY. Why?

BERYL. Because I know you. You said you would.

HARRY. Why waste those—those beautiful things on me? Unless, of course, you want to say them to me to keep your hand in.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

BERYL. I don't think being successful quite suits you, Harry.

HARRY. Oh! Why!

BERYL. You've been quite a different Harry this evening.

HARRY. And I'm likely to be the same different Harry in the future.

BERYL. Oh, so you know you've been different then?

HARRY. In exactly the same way that a man knows that his arms have been snicked off by machinery—yes. However, it doesn't matter. Do you want a well-built castle in the air—south aspect, drawing-room 25 by 25, water h. and c., an acre of garden, suitable to a young married couple? No offer refused. Must be sold, by order of the devil.

BERYL. You're talking like the reckless, bitter hero of a romantic drama.

HARRY. Well, why quarrel with me for that? They always talk fifty per cent. better than anybody else. Make the most of it. You'll soon hear nothing but Arthur's commonplace prattlings.

BERYL. I shall? Why?

HARRY. Well, I suppose you won't gag the man when you're his wife, will you?

BERYL (*thoughtfully*). Arthur's wife? I hadn't intended to think about that for some time. But when I do think of it, I don't want to think of it. No. My mind's made up.

HARRY. You don't appear to be talking Chinese.

BERYL. I'm not. I've just settled rather an im-

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

portant point, that's all. Arthur asked me to marry him just now.

HARRY. When I clumsily plumped in on the kissing episode.

BERYL. Yes, that's right. What a memory you've got. I'd forgotten that.

HARRY. Wish I had. Well, what would you like me to give you? I've got a beautiful collection of medical books you can have. Bright reading.

BERYL. I'm not marrying, thanks.

HARRY. You're talking like an idiot. What do you mean? (*He takes her by the arms and stands her in front of him.*)

BERYL. Don't hurt my arms, Harry.

HARRY. Blow your arms, what are you babbling about? I saw Arthur kiss you. Are you or are you not engaged to him?

BERYL. No, I'm not.

HARRY. Then why did he kiss you?

BERYL. Because I told him he might.

HARRY. Why?

BERYL. Because he loves me and I love him.

HARRY. You love him and yet you're not going to marry him? You're talking rot.

BERYL. Why call a thing rot simply because you don't understand it? I love several men, but I'm not going to marry them.

HARRY. Several men?

BERYL. Of course. I love you, but I don't *think* I'm going to marry you.

HARRY (*shouting*). *What did you say?*

BERYL. My dear Harry, if you shout like that your mother will think I'm hurting you.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

HARRY (*lowering his voice, holding BERYL'S arms tight, and peering into her eyes*). Did you say that you love me, or am I off my head?

BERYL. You're really hurting my arms.

HARRY (*shaking her*). Don't quibble!

BERYL. You'll shake all my hairpins out.

HARRY. Tell me what you said.

BERYL. When? I forget! I do wish you wouldn't shake me as though you were going to take me.

HARRY. I will take you, you little wretch. You said you loved me.

BERYL. You pretended you didn't hear.

HARRY. And if you love me you've got to marry me.

BERYL. Why, pray?

HARRY. Because I love you as only a really colossal ass is capable of loving.

BERYL. I quite understand what you mean, but—

HARRY. But be hanged.

BERYL. I've already told Arthur that I can't promise to marry him until I've made up my mind that I want to. I say exactly the same thing to you.

HARRY. Yes, well, and I say this to you. I don't care tuppence for your mind and whether you make it up or not. You're going to marry me. I'll hold your arms and put up with your wagging tongue until you do. Otherwise—

BERYL. Otherwise—what? Your hands are so strong that I'm certain you'd get all your pennies back in the try-your-strength machines.

HARRY. Otherwise I chuck doctoring and England and the whole game and go to Canada.

BERYL. That would be silly.

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

HARRY. A man in love is always silly.

BERYL. It would also be very rough on your father and mother.

HARRY. A man in love forgets his father and mother. Marry me, do you hear?

BERYL. All the bullying, all the threats, all the bruises in the world won't make me marry you until I know for certain that I want you.

HARRY. How will you——?

BERYL. 'Sh! Keep quite still. Don't breathe.

HARRY. What's the matter?

BERYL (*in a whisper*). Did you see someone come into the room just then?

HARRY. No. What the dickens do you mean?

BERYL. Someone came in, I'll swear.

HARRY. What sort of someone?

BERYL. A boy, all creasy and pink with curly hair and dancing eyes and a bow and arrow. Oh!
(*She starts and falls into his arms.*)

HARRY. What's up? What's wrong?

BERYL. Nothing. Everything's right. This time he got me clean in the centre of the heart.

HARRY. I don't understand a blessed word of all this!

BERYL. It doesn't matter. It's only quite a little private affair of my own. You may be interested to hear that I'm quite ready to——

HARRY. To what?

BERYL. Marry you, idiot.

HARRY. Ah! (*He seizes her and kisses her. Then he puts her into a chair and goes to the door.*)

BERYL. Where are you going?

WHY CUPID CAME TO EARL'S COURT.

HARRY. Sit still and be quiet. (*He calls.*) Father!
Mother! Phyllis! Here, quickly.

MRS. ROBERTSON (*without*). What is it, darling?
What is it? (*She enters, followed by MR. R. and PHYLLIS*).

HARRY. I said I was going to chuck doctoring.
Well, I'm not. I thought you'd like to know.
That's all.

MRS. ROBERTSON. What's happened?

MR. ROBERTSON. Beryl.

MRS. R. and PHYLLIS. Beryl!

HARRY. She's suddenly made up her absurd mind
that I'm the man she's going to marry, and
so I'm all right. What did it I don't know.

BERYL. I'll tell you. An arrow did it.

MR. R., MRS. R., and PHYLLIS. An arrow?

BERYL. Yes. That's why Cupid came to Earl's
Court.

CURTAIN.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

Characters.

COLONEL SIR RICHARD HAWKHURST.

ENID CHILWORTH.

MRS. ALLINGHAM.

The SCENE is laid in the smoking-room of Chilworth Park one morning in early autumn.

Scene: A charming room. Big arm-chairs, sporting prints, Dutch fireplace L C, window C, through which the sun pours in; several old bits of oak furniture, an armoire, an old table covered with the papers and weeklies; a writing-desk up stage, a large arm-chair in the line of sunlight down L C, opposite to the fireplace. Doors D V E and R L E.

When curtain rises, ENID, a young girl, pretty, quick, full of life and energy, is seated at writing-table addressing an envelope. This done she blots it with a bang, thrusts the letter into it, jumps up and runs to window. She gives a sharp whistle, and beckons.

ENID (*seated L calling*). Jack! (*A pause, she lowers her voice slightly to talk to a boy who is under the window*). I say, Jack, I can't come for half an hour. Isn't it rot?

Enter HAWKHURST C: he crosses to the fire-

place R, and stands with his back to it, loading a pipe, he puts a silver tobacco box on couch.

What? I know I did, but father's got to see his agent, and has told me off to keep the Colonel and Mrs. Ellingham amused until he's free. Frightfully sorry. And look here, it isn't for you to look surly. What price me? The Colonel's a darling, and Mrs. Allingham's the sweetest thing on earth; but I never know what to say to old people—what?—aren't they? Oh well, they seem old to me.

HAWKHURST (*who, at the mention of age, has drawn himself up and raised his eyebrows*). I agree with Jack, my child—sensible young man, Jack.

ENID (*turning quickly*). You've heard?

HAWKHURST. Mrs. Allingham and I are *not* old people.

ENID. I'm awf'ly sorry.

HAWKHURST (*playing at indignation*). Old people!

ENID. I'm most awfully—

HAWKHURST. Shun! Six paces to the front. Quick march.

ENID (*comes across to him*). Please forgive me.

HAWKHURST (*putting his hands on her shoulders*).

Old people, are we? (*He laughs.*) By Jove, how history repeats itself! When I had the run of this dear old place eighteen—nineteen—good Lord, it's twenty years ago, I remember being asked by your father, then in the spring of his life like you, to stay in this very room, at this identical hour, and keep some of your grandfather's guests amused, as you've been

asked. There were three of 'em—and they were all fine, strong, upstanding fellers—like me. And *I* thought that they were old—antediluvian, and funk'd it, as you do. Now *I* know that they were not only *not* old, but not even autumnal, but were enjoying their St. Martin's summer, as we are. Will you withdraw your libellous remark?

ENID (*with a smile*). Consider it scratched. I'll never say that you're old again, and I won't even think it.

HAWKHURST. Then you can go and leave me to amuse Mrs. Allingham till your father's free.

ENID. Don't you wan't me to stay?

HAWKHURST. I want you to stay very much. I want to renew our friendship.

ENID. Did you know me then all those years ago?

HAWKHURST. Certainly I did.

ENID. But I wasn't born twenty-five years ago.

HAWKHURST. Perfectly right. But I'm a friend of the family and I knew you some years before you were born. Do you want that letter posted?

ENID. I was going to ask Jack——

HAWKHURST (*takes it and goes to window*). Jack, get on your bicycle and drop this letter in the wall twenty yards to the left of the South Lodge, please. (*He throws out letter.*) And Jack! Enid has no further use for you for half an hour.

ENID (*laughing*). Revenge!

HAWKHURST. Do you mind my pipe?

ENID. I'll light it for you. (*She gets match, strikes it, and holds it up.*)

HAWKHURST. Thanks. You're going to be useful as well as amusing, eh?

ENID. Ash-tray, matches, and *Morning Post*. (*She places them on table near left.*)

HAWKHURST. I never read the paper.

ENID. But you've been reading it!

HAWKHURST. No. I was looking at the headlines and hurrying on. On my way down last night I drew a picture of you in my mind.

ENID. Am I like it?

HAWKHURST. Exactly, except for the face. Yours is like mine, but better. You have your mother's eyes, your father's nose, your mother's ears, and your father's tongue.

ENID (*laughing*). I said I was sorry!

HAWKHURST. You've nothing to be sorry about. Your father has the gift of saying things that win all hearts. When he was ten and I was nine and a half he called me a silly ass. I gave him a hiding, and we've been pals ever since.

ENID. Father's often told me of how you used to spend all your holidays here.

HAWKHURST (*looking round*). Dear old place. It's just the same. The trees are older and the bricks are warmer, and you're here, but it's none the worse for that.

ENID. Thank you!

HAWKHURST. Yes, all my holidays were spent here. Great times, my dear, great times. I've shot over the covers, and skated on the lake,

basked on the tennis-court, galloped over the turf——

ENID. Bird's-nested ?

HAWKHURST. In every tree and hedge.

ENID. Ratted ?

HAWKHURST. In every hole.

ENID. Fished ?

HAWKHURST. Every inch of the stream.

ENID. Prigged peaches ?

HAWKHURST (*making a noise with his tongue*).
Heaps of times.

ENID. Laid awake for the ghost ?

HAWKHURST (*lowering his voice*). And shivered
under the bed-clothes.

ENID. Then you did everything.

HAWKHURST. Every blessed thing. I did another
thing too. Do you know a beech-tree, three
hundred yards from the bridge ?

ENID. With initials carved on it ?

HAWKHURST. And underneath them a heart
pierced with an arrow ?

ENID. *You* carved them !

HAWKHURST. Three weeks before I went with the
regiment to India. It was a fine bit of work.
The heart was as big as that. (*He makes a circle
with his thumb and forefinger.*)

ENID. Now it's as big as this. (*She puts all her
fingers together and makes a large circle.*)

HAWKHURST. No, no, not as big as that.

ENID. Bigger.

HAWKHURST (*giving a long low whistle*). Twenty
years ago !—I was very badly in love. She was
a school friend of your Aunt Hettie's.

ENID. A dear? (*Sits couch C end.*)

HAWKHURST. No. An angel. Not tall, not short.
Just right. She had hair—and a nose—two
eyes—and a voice—lips—hands and feet.

ENID. Had she really?

HAWKHURST. And I've never met any other
woman in any other part of the world who
had any of 'em.

ENID. Good Heavens.

HAWKHURST. Because I've known you all your
life I don't think that's any reason why you
should pull my leg—I've never forgotten her.
I'm still in love with her. Each time I've come
home I've tried to find her. I'm still looking
for her. When I find her I shall marry her.

ENID. But—suppose when you do find her she's
greatly altered?

HAWKHURST. She couldn't alter.

ENID. Would you know her at once?

HAWKHURST. Instantly—anywhere.

ENID. Did you propose to her?

HAWKHURST. No. I hadn't the right—no money—
no pluck—no practise.

ENID. Then she won't have waited for you?

HAWKHURST. Good Lord, I'd forgotten that. And,
by jove, I say, we're forgetting Mrs. Allingham.
Oughtn't we to be amusing her?

ENID. I expect she's writing letters.

HAWKHURST. I don't suppose so. A woman only
writes letters when she wants to get out of an
unpleasant engagement. Don't you think we'd
better go and find her?

ENID. Do you like her?

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

HAWKHURST. Very much indeed. Immensely.
What did you say?

ENID. I asked you if you liked her?

HAWKHURST. Do I like her? Do I like Mrs. Allingham? I don't know. I believe I *shall*. She was late for breakfast and sat with her back to the light. I like the voice. It—it reminded me of—hanged if I can remember. Let's go and fetch her. I'm certain I shall like her. Coming? (*He goes off up C.*)

ENID. Yes. (*She goes towards the door.*)

Enter MRS. ALLINGHAM, R L E downstairs.

ENID. Oh, here you are!

MRS. A. Yes, here I am, as large as life. You've been smoking a pipe! (*Turns to table L.*)

ENID (*laughing*). I wish I had! It was Sir Richard.

MRS. A. (*coming down*). Oh, of course. Ah, what a delicious smell. The smoke from a big man's pipe does more to make a room really comfortable than all the furniture in the world. Where is Sir Richard? (*Sits L.*)

ENID. Gone to look for you.

MRS. A. (*turning quickly*). For me? Why? Has he remembered—(*her voice goes from eagerness to nervousness*), has he remembered that it's rather selfish to leave a fellow-guest to her own devices so soon after breakfast!

ENID. Yes, he said he thought you ought to be amused. He thinks he's going to rather like you. (*Up to table C.*)

MRS. A. (*with a laugh*). He won't be able to help himself. All big men like me—rather. *I was* going down to the lake with a book, but when

my left ear suddenly began to burn I started out to find Dick.

ENID. Dick? Who's Dick?

MRS. A. (*quickly*). The Dick, Tom or Harry who was talking about me. You and he are old friends, I suppose.

ENID. I don't know him a bit. But he knows me well. He hasn't been here since the year before I was born.

MRS. A. (*thoughtfully*). Yes, it's twenty years ago. Did he say anything about being short-sighted?

ENID. Not a word. Is he short-sighted?

MRS. A. Most men become short-sighted after twenty years. (*She picks up a round silver tobacco box, from sofa.*) Good heavens! This! R.H. from V.S.

ENID. Why, those are the initials carved on the beech-tree!

MRS. A. How do *you* know?

ENID. I've known them all my life. Sir Richard was telling me about them just now. He carved them, you know.

MRS. A. (*sits, softly*). And what did he tell you about V.S.? and the heart and the arrow through it?

ENID (*laughing*). Oh, he was very funny.

MRS. A. Funny?

ENID. He said she was the only woman who ever had two eyes and a nose and two feet in the world.

MRS. A. Did he? Did he, really? How nice of him.

ENID. In fact he raved about her.

MRS. A. And yet, from his description, she seems to have been a very ordinary woman!

ENID. So I should have thought. But *he* doesn't think so. He still loves her and is still looking for her.

MRS. A. Why didn't he tell her so when he saw her?

ENID. He hasn't seen her yet.

MRS. A. Then he *is* short-sighted.

ENID. I suggested that she may have altered past recognition.

MRS. A. (*with a break in her voice*). Altered past recognition? It's only twenty years!

ENID (*runs to her side and kneeling*). Oh, V.S. I'm sorry I said that.

MRS. A. (*putting her arms round her*). Oh, my dear it's the truth, it's the truth. No wonder he's forgotten. The V.S. whose initials he carved, the V.S. he loved and whose love he won, and never said a word to, is the same V.S. in his heart, but no longer the same to his eyes. He'll never find the V.S. for whom he's looking. Time took her by the hand twenty years ago and I don't want him ever to find the V.S. of to-day. Let him live with his dream and let me live with mine. After all, the arrow has been through the heart for twenty years.

Enter HAWKHURST. MRS. ALLINGHAM sees him, laughs merrily, and pretends to be putting ENID'S brooch in.

MRS. A. There! I think that's all right now. It would have been a pity to have lost it. I've

made it quite secure. (*In a low voice, eagerly.*)

Not a word. You promise?

ENID. I promise. (*She kisses MRS. A.*)

MRS. A. (*to HAWKHURST, who knocks out his pipe.*)

Don't stop smoking for me.

HAWKHURST. Honestly?

MRS. A. There's nothing I love so much as a pipe after breakfast.

HAWKHURST (*looking surprised*). You don't say so?

MRS. A. I don't mind confessing that I like a pipe all day long.

HAWKHURST. Don't you find it rather—bad for the teeth?

MRS. A. For the teeth? Not a bit. I only draw the line at one sort of pipe.

HAWKHURST (*politely*). The clay?

MRS. A. No, I think a clay is quite convivial. I mean the conversational pipe—the pipe that wheezes like a poor old workhouse man.

HAWKHURST. I think you're quite right. (*He looks about anxiously.*) Dash it, what have I done with my tobacco box. I wouldn't lose it for untold gold.

MRS. A. (*holding it out*). Is this it?

HAWKHURST. Oh, thanks awfully. (*He takes it.*) How do you like that mixture?

ENID (*laughing*). I believe you think that Mrs. Allingham smokes a pipe.

HAWKHURST (*to MRS. A.*). But don't you?

MRS. A. I tried once, twenty years ago, I've—never forgotten it.

HAWKHURST. By Jove, you take a load off my mind.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

There is a whistle under the window.

ENID. Jack! (*She makes an eager movement and stops.*)

HAWKHURST. Cut away, my child. (*Pushes her across to C.*)

ENID. May I, Mrs. Allingham?

MRS. A. Of course, dear. But don't let Jack cut your initials on a tree.

ENID. Why?

MRS. A. It's unlucky.

ENID *laughs and runs out glass door.*

HAWKHURST. Funny thing you should have said that, Mrs. Allingham.

MRS. A. Oh, why?

HAWKHURST. I've been thinking that it's an unlucky thing to do for a long time.

MRS. A. Did you do it then. (*Crosses to table and sits down.*)

HAWKHURST. Yes, in this park. Twenty years ago. (*Crosses R.*)

MRS. A. Can you remember doing anything so long ago as that?

HAWKHURST. Rather!

MRS. A. But why do you think it unlucky? Were they—the wrong initials? V.S. may stand for very scratchy as well as very sweet.

HAWKHURST. How did *you* know they were V.S.

MRS. A. (*quickly*). I saw them on your tobacco box and made a shot at it. Am I right?

HAWKHURST. Quite right. But they stand for Violet Stanfield.

MRS. A. Rather a pretty name.

HAWKHURST. It's very nice of you to say that.

MRS. A. (*with a laugh*). Not at all. Was she—a pretty person.

HAWKHURST (*gravely*). She never was a person.

MRS. A. I beg your pardon. It *is* rather a reproach to call a woman a person, isn't it? Almost as bad as calling a man worthy. They both suggest peppermint and cork soles.

HAWKHURST. As a matter of fact, V.S. wasn't a woman either. (*Sits on couch.*)

MRS. A. Good Heavens, what was she then?

HAWKHURST. The most beautiful girl ever known.

MRS. A. You *were* in luck!

HAWKHURST. May I tell you about her?

MRS. A. I shouldn't have thought there was anything more to tell.

HAWKHURST. Ah, you wouldn't say that if you'd known her.

MRS. A. I wish I had!

HAWKHURST. I wish you had too. She would have done you good.

MRS. A. Was she a lady doctor?

HAWKHURST. Good Lord, no! I mean, she was such a dear, such a—such a gay, true, fragrant girl.

MRS. A. (*softly*). Thank you.

HAWKHURST. Why?

MRS. A. (*quickly*). It's good to hear a man say those things about a woman. I thanked you for all the other women. Were you engaged to her?

HAWKHURST. No. No money, you see.

MRS. A. Was she so mercenary then?

HAWKHURST. Vi mercenary?

MRS. A. But I suppose she could have gone without things for you?

HAWKHURST. But a man's wife *must* dress.

MRS. A. Naturally. Unless they have a bungalow of bark on a desert island. She could have made her own dresses.

HAWKHURST. But my pay didn't run to the materials.

MRS. A. If a woman really loves a man she's ready to fight for her dress materials at Summer Clearance Sales.

HAWKHURST. I couldn't have ask her to do it, Mrs. Allingham. (*Rises, goes R.*)

MRS. A. You don't know what you have lost!

HAWKHURST. Don't I? Twenty years of happiness!

MRS. A. Twenty years. You went abroad?

HAWKHURST. India, Hong Kong, South Africa, Egypt.

MRS. A. And she?

HAWKHURST. Married, I heard, and went to live in Australia.

MRS. A. You never spoke?

HAWKHURST. No.

MRS. A. So that she wasn't to know that you loved her?

HAWKHURST. Well, I cut our initials in a tree, and carved an arrow through a heart.

MRS. A. Yes, her heart!

HAWKHURST. No, it was meant to be a sort of joint heart.

MRS. A. Is she alive?

HAWKHURST (*angrily*). Of course she's alive.

MRS. A. I beg your pardon. Even the most beautiful girls ever known haven't the gift of perpetual life.

HAWKHURST. You gave me a shock. I'm sorry I barked like that.

MRS. A. Not a bit, I like you for barking. Why don't you try and find her?

HAWKHURST. I am trying.

MRS. A. She may be free.

HAWKHURST. Yes, she may be free.

MRS. A. But suppose she's forgotten?

HAWKHURST. I refuse to suppose that. It's very kind of you to be so sympathetic.

MRS. A. Oh no, not at all. I suppose you would know her if you saw her?

HAWKHURST. Anywhere. Instantly.

MRS. A. Really!—She won't be the most beautiful girl ever known now, you know.

HAWKHURST (*hotly*). I beg your pardon, she won't have altered a day.

MRS. A. She really seems to be a very wonderful woman.

HAWKHURST. It's very good of you to be so interested.

MRS. A. The whole thing seems to me to be so—sad.

HAWKHURST. Sad? Mrs. Allingham?

MRS. A. For the girl, I mean. Twenty years ago you and she loved each other. You never said a word because you thought more of her dresses than her happiness. But she knew that you loved her—because you carved her initials on the beech-tree and drove an arrow into a heart.

It was all very well for you—you had your work and your career, and they filled your life during these twenty years. But what of the girl? She waited and waited and waited, but still there was never a word. For years she said, "To-morrow—there is to-morrow." But all the to-morrows became to-days until she said, "Yesterday—it was yesterday." She watched you in India and Hong Kong, South Africa—(*putting her hand suddenly on her heart*)—those black days—and in Egypt. Up the ladder you went, brave and strong, but he has forgotten, she said, waiting at home. Then *she* had her black days, and met the Angel of Death upon the threshold and saw him take away father and mother. And she was lonely and without a to-morrow, and at last—at last. (*her voice broke*) Old Robin Gray came a' court-in' o' me.

She puts her hands over her face. HAWKHURST bends towards her, but is afraid to move. Then goes forward and gently takes her hand away, moves her slightly until the sun falls on her face.

HAWKHURST. Vi!

MRS. A. (*softly*). Dick!

They stand apart looking at each other. He has her hands.

HAWKHURST. I should have known you anywhere,
Vi.

MRS. A. So it seems, Dick.

HAWKHURST. You haven't altered a day, Vi.

MRS. A. I'm glad you think so, Dick.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

HAWKHURST. I love you, Vi.

MRS. A. Thank you, Dick.

*She flings her arms round his neck, laughing
and crying. ENID runs in and stops,
and tip-toes out.*

CURTAIN.

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

Characters.

HELEN MERIDITH (*Typewriter*).

PAMELA MERIDITH (*Actress*).

JANE (*their servant*).

The SCENE takes place in the MERIDITHS' sitting-room in their lodgings in Shepherd's Bush.

Scene : The curtain rises upon a shabby room of the ordinary, rather more than ordinary, lodging-house kind. The furniture is of the cheap villa type, hideous, gim-crack, and uncomfortable, but, here and there, there are unmistakable evidences of a refined hand and of remote comfort—an echo of “better days” in a large photograph on wall C, of a distinguished soldier in full uniform, a sword hanging beneath it, several framed groups of officers, and so on.

The fireplace is L C. There is a stiff, ugly arm-chair above it, and a tea-table right of chair. Another table R holds a typewriting machine and a large lamp. A large pile of typewritten sheets lie upon a chair beside table, and on the floor beneath are scattered the pages of MSS. The table is large enough to permit of a space, upon which are pens and ink and large envelopes, a box of paper pins and other paraphernalia of typewriting. Doors R L. Windows C with space between them.

As curtain rises an elderly little woman, thin

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

old-fashioned, respectable, and somewhat of the Gumidge order is discovered.

Shooting the top of her tongue against her teeth as women do when children are naughty, she moves nervously and quickly and with something of panic from place to place, searching for something that has been mislaid. She peers at the typewriting table, moving it, and then goes to sideboard, opening drawers, lifting books and papers. She then goes towards door.

JANE. Oh dear, oh dear. Have *you* found it, Miss Helen?—No, miss?—Oh, and the hands of the clock seeming to race! It must be somewhere (*tearfully*). It can't 'ave run away. (*She continues her hunt, going over the same ground.*)

Enter HELEN MERIDITH, a beautiful woman of about thirty-five, very plainly even poorly dressed, but wearing a smile of such courage and sweetness that her eyes seem like beacons.

HELEN. Found it, Jane?

JANE (*in great distress, becoming impotent*). Miss Helen!

HELEN. Oh! (*She gives a nervous, overwrought look round the room and then pulls herself up.*) However, as my father used to say, the one moment never to get into a panic is when your men are in a tight corner between two fires. The last post goes in fifteen minutes. The last chapters of this book—*must* go by the last post. I gave my word. And the little book in which I carefully wrote the author's present address—is lost.

JANE. Missing, Miss Helen, only missing.

HELEN (*looking anxiously at the clock*). Jane, dear, stand quite still for a moment. Take hold of yourself firmly, and think.

JANE (*holding the back of a chair*). Yes, Miss Helen.

HELEN. There is lots of time—we have only to find the book—the packet is ready except the address, and it will take two minutes to run to the pillar box.

JANE. I have done it just under two, Miss Helen.

HELEN. You see. So that, at present, all is well, dear Jane. Now it's a little book, with a dark leather cover, stamped "Addresses" in gold letters. A very good little book——

JANE. Oh, I *know* Miss Helen. It cost at least five and six——

HELEN (*with a smile of intense love*). The one my sister sent me from Blackpool on my birthday.

JANE. Oh, I know, Miss Helen. I should know it anywhere.

HELEN. Well, try and think where you saw it last.

JANE. It *is* so important, isn't it, Miss Helen?

HELEN. Mr. Campbell is almost the last of my regular customers, and if he doesn't find his last chapters on his breakfast-table to-morrow morning he may leave me for one of the large typewriting firms.

JANE. I saw it here this morning, Miss Helen, as plain as plain——

HELEN. And so you tidied it away, Jane.

JANE. Yes, Miss Helen, I did.

HELEN. Although that is its proper place.

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

JANE. I moved the type paper here. (*She indicates the sideboard.*)

HELEN. And I discovered my india-rubber on the mantel-board——

JANE. And I may 'ave put the little book there too for safety. (*She runs to the fireplace.*) Miss Helen, I did.

HELEN. How clever of you, Jane. Give it to me quickly. We've just got time. (*She sits at table and puts typewriting into envelope.*)

JANE. What name, Miss Helen?

HELEN. Give me the book. Campbell. Ah, here it is. (*She writes quickly.*) Two stamps, Jane.

JANE. Two, Miss Helen?

HELEN. Thank you. Throw a shawl over your head. (*She puts on the stamps.*)

JANE. Oh, it's a mild night, Miss Helen.

HELEN. And run. (*She holds the envelope towards JANE.*)

JANE. That I will. (*She takes the envelope and runs out.*)

HELEN. Thank God.

She sits upright for a moment, with all the light out of her face and then suddenly puts her arms on the table and her head goes down upon her arms, worn out.

Enter PAMELA, in her outdoor clothes. She stands dejected and pale in the doorway for a moment. Then, seeing HELEN'S attitude, comes forward quickly and puts her hand on her shoulder.

PAMELA. Worn out, darling?

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

HELEN (*sitting up quickly with a plucky smile*). No dear, not a bit.

PAMELA. And you've done all those pages to-day?

HELEN. Oh, that's nothing.

PAMELA. Where's Jane?

HELEN. She won't be a minute. She's just gone to the post.

PAMELA. You've only just finished. You began at seven this morning.

HELEN. I'm thankful to have the work to do, dearest.

PAMELA (*with a sob*). Nell!

HELEN (*with a smile*). Darling. Now for your supper.

PAMELA (*harshly*). No, if you stir a finger, I'll eat nothing. You've worked till your eyes are in the back of your head. Come and sit by the fire. (*She crosses to it.*)

HELEN. You know I love getting your supper. Don't deprive me of——

PAMELA. Nell! The fire's not been lit all day. How *dare* you sit in a cold room.

HELEN. Working keeps me warm. I forgot to ask Jane to light it.

JANE (*entering*). There now. And I generally light it just before you come back, Miss Pamela.

HELEN. Ssssh! (*JANE puts a match to the fire.*)

PAMELA (*bursting out, angry because her love for her sister is so great*). Ah, now I've got the truth. You light it just before I come back to trick me into believing that it's been alight all day! To save coal you sit here freezing. How dare you! How dare you!

HELEN (*quietly*). Jane, get supper.

JANE. Yes, Miss Helen. (*She goes out L quickly.*)

HELEN (*going to PAMELA*). Let me take your hat, darling.

PAMELA (*turning suddenly and flinging her arms round HELEN almost fiercely*). Nell, Nell, I love you better than life. You know I do. But you want to die and leave me. You want to catch pneumonia and get out of this hideous struggle. You'll drive me mad with your cunning unselfishness.

HELEN (*kissing PAMELA*). My precious! (*Controlling herself by being rigidly commonplace.*) But your coat's wet! Slip it off quickly. (*She takes off the coat.*) And your shoes are so thin. Sit down and let me take them off. (*PAMELA sits in chair above fireplace and bends at her feet.*) These April showers are very trying for Londoners, although they are washing the little faces of the primroses. How lucky we are to be so delightfully near the Tube. Think how wet you'd have got on top of a 'bus. There, first the right—(*she puts on a slipper*)—and then the left. (*She gives a merry laugh.*) There's one of Jane's best efforts for supper, Pam. A steak and kidney pie, scorching hot. Was there a good house to-night?

PAMELA. The theatre closes on Saturday night.

HELEN (*involuntarily*). Oh! Pam! (*Long pause.*)

Still, it couldn't close at a better time. You'll be free for new work with the season beginning.

PAMELA (*gives a bitter laugh*). And anything's better than the tiny part you are playing now.

PAMELA. Anything—yes, *anything!*

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

Enter JANE with a tray. She brings it to tea-table R of chair.

HELEN (*bustling about, placing a neat table-cloth*). Here's Jane. Oh! doesn't it smell nice. That's right. (*She takes tray*.) I'll see to it while you run and make the cocoa.

JANE. It's all ready, Miss Helen. (*She hurries out again*.)

HELEN. Dear old Jane. She gets younger every day. And yet it's fifteen years to-morrow that she first came to us. Do you remember? It was exactly three weeks after father returned from Egypt, a full Colonel.

PAMELA (*leaning back wearily*). I'm so tired.

HELEN. You must be, darling. These matinée days are so trying. I hope you had a good dinner between the performances?

PAMELA. Did I? It seems—so long ago.

HELEN. There! It's already.

PAMELA. Thank you. (*She remains leaning back limply*.)

Enter JANE, with a hot cup.

JANE. I've sugared and milked it, Miss Pamela.

PAMELA *remains silent with closed eyes.*

HELEN. Don't let your supper get cold, Pam.

PAMELA. Must I eat to-night?

JANE. Oh, miss! Dear!

HELEN (*leaning over the table*). To oblige me.

PAMELA (*sits up and smiles. She stretches out her hand and caresses HELEN'S cheek*). Dearest! (*She begins to eat*.)

JANE. That's what I call steak, that is. As tender as tender can be.

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

PAMELA. Yes, it's delicious.

HELEN. I'm so glad it's all right.

PAMELA. What time did you have your supper, Nell?

HELEN (*evasively*). Oh, I? Let me see. What time was it, Jane?

JANE (*hesitatingly*). Well, Miss Helen—

PAMELA. You've not had supper. Good heavens! (*She jumps up.*) Jane, another plate, knife, and fork, quickly.

JANE. Yes, miss. (*She goes out.*)

HELEN. No, no, Pam—please. I had a good dinner and tea—

PAMELA. Very well, then. Give this to the cat.

HELEN. Pam!

PAMELA. Either that or you have some with me. I don't eat another morsel unless you do. Do you think I'm going to let you give up everything for me? Another word and I go to bed. Oh, Nell, you make me want to cry or swear. Eat, I tell you.

Enter JANE with another plate, knife, and fork.

JANE. The plate *can't* be hot, miss.

PAMELA (*taking it*). I don't care. (*She sits in HELEN's chair.*) Now, if you don't see that my sister has a fire all day long—

HELEN. Not all day.

PAMELA. All day and every day while it's cold, Jane, and, when I'm not here to see that she does it, has proper meals at proper times—

HELEN. But I do—always.

PAMELA. Either *you* go, Jane, or *I* do. You may choose.

JANE (*tearfully*). Oh dear, oh dear. What between one and another?

PAMELA (*helping HELEN to move*). You see!

HELEN. No, no, I couldn't.

PAMELA. You shall!

JANE. And I'm to go, am I? That's the latest—after all these years rough and smooth—just because you both want me to look most after the other! I never met such a pair for quarrelling for love.

HELEN and PAMELA *stretch out a hand simultaneously and grasp. They both laugh softly, looking into each other's eyes. They resume eating.*

PAMELA (*softly*). It's time you popped into bed, Jane.

HELEN. Yes, I will clear away.

JANE. Oh, thank you, miss, but——

PAMELA. Good-night.

JANE. Good-night, Miss Pamela; good-night, Miss Helen. What time in the morning, miss? (*To HELEN.*)

PAMELA. Nine. You've finished your work. You must lie late for once.

HELEN (*heaving a sigh of anticipation*). Yes! For once—good night, Jane.

JANE *pauses irresolutely, picks up an empty plate and carries it off reluctantly.*

PAMELA. You are a wonder.

HELEN. I am?

PAMELA. I never thought you could get those chapters done to-night.

HELEN. I'd given my word.

PAMELA. A Meridith never breaks his word.

HELEN. Not those who can boast of Meridith of Plessy, Meridith of Waterloo and Meridith whose sword is a beacon in *our* lives.

PAMELA (*drops her knife*). I'm sorry! (*From this moment she ceases to eat and her face becomes hard.*)

Mr. Campbell will be a brute if he takes his work from you after this.

HELEN. I don't think he will—yet.

PAMELA. Why yet?

HELEN. All my clients leave me sooner or later.

PAMELA. Your work is exquisite. Never a mistake.

HELEN. It isn't because I don't work well. It's because no one private person can compete with the offices that have set up everywhere these days.

PAMELA. Their work isn't a patch on yours.

HELEN. Mine is good enough, but their's is done so much more quickly. And that's everything. The work is divided up amongst a staff of girls learning to type—and paying to learn.

PAMELA. Paying to learn. Yes, that's the devil of it. Anyone who can pay, or get others to pay for them, can get on where others can't who have nothing but brains and energy.

HELEN. Still I mustn't grumble yet. Some people won't leave me for father's sake. And if the worst come to the worst there is always an office.

PAMELA. Yes, where cads of men will puff tobacco in your face and treat you like a pack-horse.

HELEN. I rather like tobacco, and as to being a pack-horse, darling, so long as one is well and

strong what does it matter how hard one works. I think I should rather like being in an office. We could go up to middle of London together and then I could see that you were not run over by a motor. I sit here sometimes and worry dreadfully when you are a little late and my head swims with fright. And we could often meet for lunch at the A.B.C.

PAMELA. You will never have to rub shoulders with all the other superfluous women. I've seen it coming, but thank God I can prevent it.

HELEN (*betraying an intense and pathetic eagerness*).
How, Pam?

PAMELA. Our bad times are over, they're at an end.

HELEN. At an end?

PAM. Yes, at an end. This is the last time you'll have to sit over a typewriter from seven in the morning till twelve at night. This is the last time you'll shiver in the cold all day to keep the coals for me. This is the last time you'll go without supper so that I may eat steak and kidney pie. This hideous chapter is at an end.

HELEN. Blessed chapter. (*Rises.*) You are my—only sister! (*Embraces.*)

PAMELA. And because you are my only sister, I thank God that it's over.

HELEN. You have good news?

PAMELA. Yes. I have good news.

HELEN. Pam! What is it? Is your talent to be recognised at last? Are you going to be rewarded for your years of touring and understudying, and playing small parts?

PAMELA. I am going to be leading lady at the

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

Prince's Theatre for two years, at thirty pounds a week.

HELEN *remains standing and staring for a moment. Then she sinks into her chair and puts her hands over her face and bursts into violent weeping.*

PAMELA (*rushing to her sister and going on her knees, wrapping her arms round her and pouring out a hurricane of words*). Don't cry, sweetheart, darling sister. Your beautiful face shan't be lined any more by incessant work. I will crowd your lovely fingers with rings, and you shall have a sealskin from your neck to your heels. No more living with the gas turned down. No more waiting for typewriting that never comes. No more Tubes. No more unpaid bills staring one in the face.

HELEN (*sobbing and laughing*). A leading lady, at last!

PAMELA. Yes, at last.

HELEN. And all that money. Did you say thirty pounds a month—it surely can't be a week?

PAMELA. Yes, a week. At last! (*She rises and stretches out her arms.*)

HELEN. And it comes just at the moment when everyone is leaving me, and you are getting desperate. Oh, God *does* look after the little people who try—He does, He does.

PAMELA (*after a pause—with bitter sarcasm*). Do you really think He does?

HELEN (*with a startled and uneasy look at PAMELA*). If He doesn't, how has this wonderful thing come to you?

PAMELA. This comes to me through a man who happens to be in love with me. He would marry me if he could, but he's got a wife in a house for drunkards—just think! For years I've been hanging round stage doors. For years I've been under-studying and playing small parts—old women when my face has been unlined, smart women of the world when my shoes were patched and threadbare, cold, hard women when my heart's been full of tears. For years I've longed to act. You don't know how I could act if they'd let me. But all the joy of my work has been denied to me, and only the labour left. *Why?* (*Pause.*) Because I hadn't any influence, because I hadn't the necessary push, because—just the ordinary little bit of luck never came my way. And because I was father's daughter and wouldn't pay. I've stood out for months and months because I thought that the daughter of such a man as father should go straight. But to-night has decided me. No daughter of father's shall starve as you starve, work as you work, grind as you grind, when father's other daughter can alter all this if she likes. And I *do* like. I *mean* to do it. I *choose* to do it. There's no other way left open for me, so I'm going to pay—he's a very kind man.

There is a pause. PAMELA *resolute, hard.*

HELEN *looks at her horror-stricken, wordless from fear and pity. Then she pulls herself together and tries to smile and be cheerful and commonplace.*

SOLDIER'S DAUGHTERS.

HELEN (*quietly*). I wondered how soon this would come.

Enter JANE with a smile.

JANE (*crossing to fireplace with a scuttle of coal*). I forgot to fill the scuttle, Miss Helen. I've brought the one from the kitchen. I expect you will sit a little longer. (*She puts on coal.*)

HELEN. Oh, thank you, Jane. Yes, we are not going to bed. Not too much. I think that will do. Good-night.

JANE (*obviously wishing to stay*). It's such a nice night, miss. As fresh as fresh. And the little new moon's a-lyin' on its back like a cheeky baby. It's worth having a look at, miss, but for goodness sake don't look at it through glass.

HELEN. Very well, Jane, I won't. Good-night.

JANE (*hesitating*). They've put straw down outside No. 22, miss. Poor Mrs. Stagg! It's her ninth, and the straw's been down everytime. Comes expensive, don't it, miss?

HELEN. I suppose it does, Jane. 'Er—good-night.

JANE. Good-night, miss. (*Looks anxiously at PAM.*) Sure there's nothing I can do? I'm not a bit tired. Let me tidy up something.

HELEN. No, no. I'll see to the tray. Good-night, Jane.

JANE. If you please, miss, don't think me curious, but there's nothing the matter, is there?

HELEN. No, dear Jane, nothing.

JANE. Oh dear, oh dear! It's like having a weight took off my heart to hear that, miss. I'm fanciful, I suppose, what with the new moon and that straw. (*Brightly.*) I've put the hot

water bottle all ready, miss. You could cook an egg on it. And you'll find a new box of matches next to the pin tray. • Good-night, Miss Helen.

HELEN. Good-night.

JANE. Good-night, Miss Pamela.

(PAMELA doesn't answer. JANE goes out.)

HELEN (*moving the tray from the table to the side-board*). Dear old Jane. How thoughtful she is. I believe she will always look upon us as helpless children, unable to look after ourselves. (*She returns and removes the cloth.*) Will you take one end, darling? (PAMELA does so.) How well these table-cloths have worn. Good things do sometimes come out of sales. Don't they? Thank you. (*She kisses PAMELA and takes the cloth to the sideboard.*)

PAMELA sits L of table, with her hands in her lap.

HELEN. And now for a cosy little talk. (*Her tone is cheerful, but the look she darts at PAMELA is tragic.*) And while we discuss future plans I will make myself useful. This wet weather has made these walls quite damp. I've been meaning to rub the rust off father's sword for days. (*She gets it down, picks up a duster, and comes to chair R of table. Sits. PAMELA looks at sword and shivers.*) In what neighbourhood do you think of choosing a flat?

PAMELA. I leave it to you.

HELEN (*quietly rubbing the sword, but looking closely at PAMELA*). Somewhere off Regent Street, I should think. Most of us go there—under these conditions.

PAMELA. Don't include yourself with me.

HELEN. What you do I do, darling.

PAMELA. That's nonsense.

HELEN. Highlanders stand shoulder to shoulder
you know.

PAMELA. I stand alone, in this.

HELEN. Do you mean then, you prefer to live alone?

PAMELA (*bending slightly forward*). Not if you—
not if you will come with me.

HELEN. I will come with you wherever you go.
I couldn't live away from you.

PAMELA. But as you are—always as you are?

HELEN. I shall be proud to be as you are, darling.

PAMELA. Don't!

HELEN (*busily rubbing*). This is the first speck
there has ever been on this dear sword! Dear,
dear, dear, dear!

PAMELA (*with a burst*). Can't you put that back?

HELEN. In a minute, darling. Yes, I think Regent
Street will be best. For another thing you will
be so close to your Theatre. No more tubes
soon, no more motor busses! Dear old tubes.
They're very bright and quick, though I confess
I always do feel a little nervous in the lifts.
And how odd it will seem not to have a land-
lady, and hear other lodgers coughing in the
night, and knocking out a pipe on the fireplace
—poor, hard-working boys, tired after a long
day's work, doing their best to keep straight
and good for the sake of their mothers, who see
them so seldom and pray for them each night.
Dear boys. I shall miss their step, and the
sound of the front door banging in the morning

—Who can we give father's sword to when we go away?

PAMELA. Why should we give it to anyone?

HELEN. We can't take it with us—there.

PAMELA. Why not?

HELEN. It has never yet had a stain on it that could not be rubbed away.

PAMELA *puts her hands over her face.*

HELEN *looks at her quickly; but goes on speaking quietly, standing with sword held out grandly.*

Harry Meridith's sword, that hung at his side through all the ups and downs of his life, that he carried from the bottom of the ladder to the top, brighter and gleaming with greater honour at the end than at the beginning! It must be left—after all, we can't have both. We choose comfort and ambition, and leave our father's sword behind. In these fusty rooms, with their damp walls it will get rusty, but will not be eaten into by something that can't be removed. We are women, but we have kept you bright, old sword (*she kisses it*), because you were our father's, and we are our father's daughters, soldier's daughters, fighters too. (*Turning up.*)

PAMELA (*with a cry*). Don't put that back.

HELEN (*facing PAMELA eagerly*). Do we go on? Do we remain fighters? Do we keep this blade bright?

PAMELA. Yes, oh yes!

HELEN. Thank God. (*They embrace.*)

CURTAIN.

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